California Holocaust Memorial Week

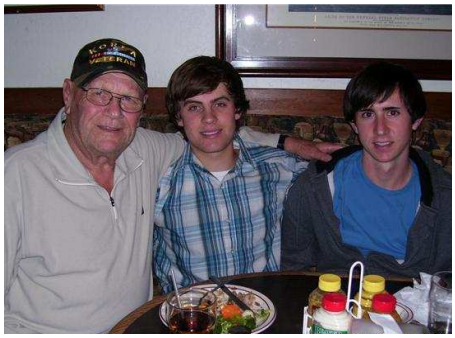
April 20 –April 26, 2009

Assemblymember Ira Ruskin
21st Assembly District

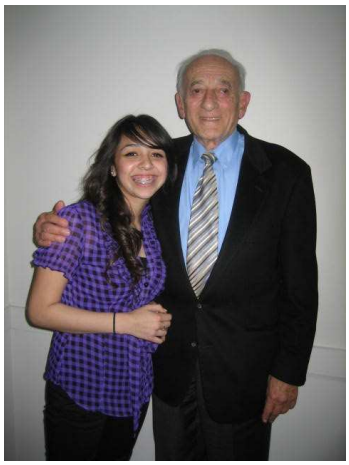
Assemblymember Mike Feuer
42nd Assembly District

Stella Beck

Bernard Marks

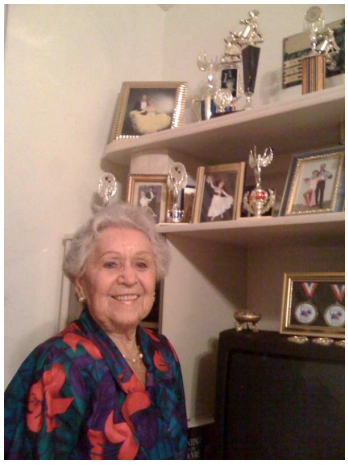


Bill Rooz with
Alex Owens and Jake Nilson



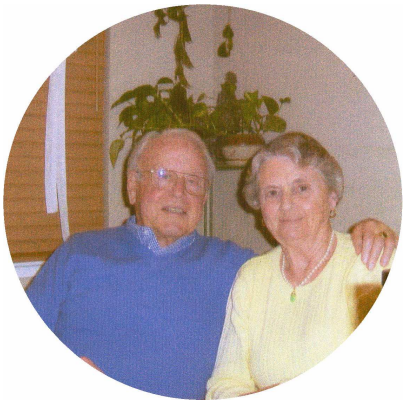
Jack Brauns with
Stephannie D. Ramirez

Bert Schapelhouman



Bella Roos

Dorothy Greenstein



Werner and Lilo Loeb

Louis VanderMolen

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0115

Assembly
California Legislature

April 27, 2009

Dear Friends,

We are proud to present the 2009 California Holocaust Memorial Book. For the past six years, the California State Assembly has honored survivors during California Holocaust Memorial Week in April. Through this project, California honors the lives and experiences of the survivors of the Holocaust, gives remembrance to the millions who lost their lives, and works to ensure that people understand the horror of genocide.

Inside this book you will find many powerful portrayals of courage and survival during one of the most horrific periods in human history. Students participating in this project met individually with Holocaust survivors throughout the State of California, in order to learn their stories of survival and recount them in the essays presented in this book. The students forged personal connections that facilitated a deep contextual understanding of Holocaust atrocities. Through these interviews, many young Californians were able to gain an expanded appreciation for the courage of Holocaust survivors who bravely endured so much suffering. Their heroism will live on through the stories told in this book.

Survivors from throughout California are invited to sit with Assemblymembers on the Assembly floor during the Holocaust Memorial Ceremony.

We are honored to have had the opportunity to coordinate this project, and we appreciate the support and participation of the survivors, students and our colleagues. We are confident that this project will continue to thrive as we celebrate those who have survived to tell their stories, and seek to ensure that the Holocaust is never forgotten.

Sincerely,

MIKE FEUER
Assemblymember, *42nd District*

IRA RUSKIN
Assemblymember, *21st District*

Directory

Directory

Assemblymember Ira Ruskin

District 21

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

David Keller	*Interviewed by Anna Bernstein and Tomi Weissenberger*
Luba Keller	*Interviewed by Victoria Herbert*
Margot Lobree	*Interviewed by Devon Fernandez and Audrey Harris*
Edith Marx Trevino	*Interviewed by Valarie Makovkin*
Ruth Willdorff	*Interviewed by Caitlyn Fernandez and Lauren Meier*

Acknowledgements

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Bobbi Bornstein, Volunteer Coordinator

Carlmont High School, Belmont, CA

Margret Kanner

Arthur Keller

Summit Preparatory Charter High School
Redwood City, CA
Todd Dickson, Principal
Elana Feinberg, History Teacher

By Anna Bernstein and Tomi Weissenberger

A Life in the Shoes of David Keller

This is an account of David Keller's story, detailing his Holocaust experience and its aftermath. He was born in a small town in Poland in 1923, were he attended school until he was 13 years old. He then left his family's farm near Turka and worked in a shoe store while his brother attended Yeshiva. Unfortunately in 1941, he was taking a walk when the Nazis captured him and dragged him into a Nazi controlled camp that was still under construction. This new camp would later be known as Auschwitz. He was assigned to work on the Autobahn, working long hours shoveling dirt to create the famous roadway. In the camp the prisoners were served small rations of food at meal times. If they were called back to work before they finished eating, they were forced to leave what was left of their food and return to work. This forced prisoners to eat very quickly, a habit that has stayed with David Keller to this day. The prisoners all slept in unbearably crowded barracks. Mr. Keller says that he was lucky to be able to work on the Autobahn because the officers who watched over him and the other prisoners wanted them to be healthy and strong so they could get a lot of work done; therefore, they weren't as harshly punished for as those working inside of the other work camps. In order to avoid punishment and possible extermination, he always obeyed the officers and worked hard on the tasks that he was given. He was moved from camp to camp, following the widening and construction of the Autobahn highway. Days before the liberation, the Germans and the Russians were shooting at each right outside of the camp. Bullets sometimes flew through the camp accidentally, and prisoners sometimes were shot.

While being transported to another camp by train, Mr. Keller was assigned to a train car that was destined for a death camp where all occupants of the car would be shot and killed upon arrival. Miraculously, American soldiers intersected the train, and rescued Mr. Keller from the car. If they had come a day later he would not be alive today.

When American soldiers liberated his camp, he asked a soldier to help him contact his three uncles in Brooklyn, New York. He gave the soldier three letters, and the soldier mailed them to his cousin on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The soldier's cousin happened to know Mr. Keller's relatives because they owned a restaurant where the soldier's cousin ate frequently. After receiving the letter, Mr. Keller's uncle contacted him immediately, asking him if he needed clothes, money, or a place to live. He said that he wanted nothing but to leave Europe and live in the United States. At that time, they were not allowing refugees into the United States, but three months later, the embassy allowed to immigrate to the United States. It took seven more months from the time he applied for residency until he finally arrived in New York City in 1947 on a ship called the Marine Flasher.

In between the time he was liberated from the Nazis and immigrating to the United States, Mr. Keller lived in a relocation camp in Feldafing, Germany. Mr. Keller met Ms. Luba Keller at the relocation camp. Ms. Keller was very weak and almost dead when she was liberated. She was bedridden at Feldefing for a long time, but thankfully she recovered. They

became friends, and when Ms. Keller wanted to go back to her hometown in Mr. Keller persuaded her not to return. Anti-Semitism still remained strong in Poland after the war and many Jews were murdered when they returned to their now occupied homes. Thankfully Ms. Keller didn't join the group heading back to Poland as many of them were indeed murdered upon their return. Mr. Keller's relatives in America gave him the ability to register several people as "family members" so they could also immigrate. In order to bring Ms. Lupa to America he wrote on the registration form that she was his wife. This is how they were legally married; although they did have a more traditional ceremony soon after arriving in America. They sailed from a sea port in Belgium to America in 11 days on the Marine Flasher. While on the boat Ms. Keller became sea sick, so Mr. Keller bought her a "black market" grapefruit with part of the $10 they gave him when he boarded the ship. Upon there arrival, he bought himself a shirt with the remainder of his money. The Friday night of their arrival, Mr. and Ms. Keller went to Shabbat with their relatives. Ms. Keller said she did not believe in God after seeing so many horrible things during the Holocaust, but after arriving in America and seeing all their relatives attending Shabbat, she was able to believe that we do have a God here in America.

Mr. Keller found work at his relative's restaurant as a busboy. Finding a job elsewhere would have been very difficult because he only attended school until he was 13 due to the Holocaust, and he did not know a specific trade. He worked at the restaurant for 22 years, eventually becoming the night manager. He quit when the nighttime hours became too difficult maintain. Once he and his wife had children, sleeping during the day proved difficult. He became the Labor Chief of his Union and worked hard. He also gained a reputation for being honest despite the constant corruption and bribes from businessmen looking to increase their profits. Due to his honest and hard working reputation, Mr. Keller was promoted to a Business Agent position. Even though some other Business Agents were not very friendly towards him because of his honesty and work ethic, he still worked at the Union for 14 years. Mr. Keller says that he is proud of his work at the Union because he always did what was right, and with no "monkey business." He was a board member and leader at his Sabbath in Brooklyn as well. Mr. and Ms. Keller moved to California about 13 years ago, and they are both involved in local community service.

Luba Keller

By Victoria Herbert

Luba's Memoirs of the Holocaust

The Nazis first came to Luba's town in Poland in 1939. She was just 15 years old, but she said she would never forget that day. Nazi planes swooped low over their town. She said, "Mama, look at that!" but her mother told her to stay in the house. The next day, Saturday, the Nazis came to their synagogue and made all of the Jews come outside onto the main street. Luba's mother took her and her two sisters into a building across the street to be safe. They watched through a window as the Nazis brought the Rabbi out of the synagogue. The Polish people screamed as the Nazis tied the Rabbi's legs and arms. They tied a cloth across his mouth, too. They started pulling at the Rabbi's beard. Her friend told her to go home, but Luba wanted to watch what was happening. She was so nervous that she was biting her fingers. Once the Nazis took a pail of water and poured it on the Rabbi's head, she knew she didn't want to watch any longer. Luba took a shortcut and ran home. When she got home she screamed, "We don't have a God!" Her father told her not to say that but she kept saying it over and over again as she cried. Her father slapped her when she said it, and eventually she grew very tired so she hid under the bed and fell asleep.

About two hours later she awoke to the stomping footsteps of the Germans. They came into her house to count how many people were in her family. Luba's youngest sister was three years old and was frightened by the Nazis. When the little girl ran to her mother, the Nazis told her not to. The girl kept pulling on her mother's clothes for help and the Nazis started to hit her. The Nazis kept hitting the little girl and she began bleeding. The mother pushed her down because she did not want the Nazis to kill her baby. Then the girl ran out the door and hid in the garden. The Nazis could not find her, and so they said "auf wiedersehen" and left. Luba's family searched and searched for her little sister but could not find her. They cried because they knew that if she ran onto the main street in the front of the house, the Germans would kill her. Finally, Luba's brother found the little sister. For the next three days the little girl held on tightly to the brother and did everything with him. She would not go near her mother.

As time went on, the Germans visited the town every week. The second week they came, they raided a closed shoe store. The owner of the store was yelling, "What are you doing?" so they killed him.

At that time Luba was still going to school. The Nazis came into the schools and asked the Polish teachers how many Jews they had in their classrooms. At one school, the Nazis took out all the Jewish girls and raped them. After that incident, a friend warned Luba's family so Luba and her siblings stopped going to school.

Three months later, while Luba was at a friend's house, a truck came by. Nazis jumped out of the truck and grabbed her. She was the only girl among the four Jews in the truck. The other three were boys around the age of eighteen or nineteen. They were taken to a Polish farm and given to the people who lived there as workers. The Nazis told the Polish people to punish

them because they were Jews. The women of the household told the boys to sleep in the chicken coop and let Luba sleep in the foyer. The Jewish boys decided to leave the farm. A Polish man told Luba he would walk with her because she didn't know her way home. They walked for hours and hours. Luba's shoes were very uncomfortable and they gave her terrible blisters. When she got home, it was dark. The doors of her house were locked because her family was scared of the Nazis. Luba yelled her name and they let her in. She could not walk for weeks after that because of how painful her blisters were.

A few weeks later, the Nazis came and made everybody come out onto the main street. They separated the Jews by age. Luba's sister was in the 17 to 19 age group. They told the Jews to register and that the next day they would have to come and work. Luba's mother was crying and her sister didn't want to go. Luba volunteered to take her sister's place. She thought that the Nazis would mistake her for being older. The next day, she went with the Nazis. She remembers being tossed up into a big truck because she couldn't get in by herself. As the truck left, Luba saw her mother in the street trying to reach her. The Germans wouldn't let her mother through. Her mother fell down, weeping, and Luba knew that was it. That was the end.

Luba was the youngest in her entire group. That night they all had to sleep in barracks. The next day they were woken up at six in the morning. The Nazis took roll call and when they got to Luba, Luba had to remember to say her sister's name. If she accidentally said her own name, the Nazis would go kill her parents.

The Jews then had to wait in line for two hours until they were escorted to an ammunition factory called Hasag. In the factory, Luba had to stamp numbers onto bullet shells. She had to sit hunched over and catch the bullets as they fell off of a conveyor belt. She was so afraid of making a mistake because she knew that she would get in big trouble. Once, Luba accidentally stamped one of her fingers. Every Sunday, Nazi officials would take away any injured Jews. At the time, none of the Jews knew where they went. They were being taken to Auschwitz to be killed. Luba's cousin's friend was a guard at her camp. He saw that she was injured and told her not to go with them. Instead, he took her to a nursing station that the Red Cross visited every now and then. The guard told them to take care of her, so they bandaged her finger and gave her some medication. She could not work the next day because her whole arm was hurting.

Luba worked in that factory for months. Two Jews, a man and a woman, came to the camp. Their family was rich. They wanted to go home, so they paid the Nazis to let them leave. As the camp's entrance and exit there were two tall fences. The Nazis thought that if the other Jews saw those two leave, they would try to escape. The Nazis began digging a pit. The Nazi guard let the two siblings through the first gate, but not the second. That day, the Nazis brought all the Jews outside. In front of everyone they beat the rich, Jewish man to death and threw him in the pit. They then pushed his sister into the pit and buried her alive. One of the Nazi soldiers said, "If you're going to try to run away, you'll end up like these people." The next day the Jews were talking in the barracks. They were talking about what happened to the man and woman, but Luba was too afraid to say anything. The Jews did not know that the Nazi soldiers were outside listening. They came in and took the young woman from the top bunk, in the first row of the barracks. They made everyone go outside and watch them shoot the woman. One of the soldiers said, "If you're going to talk, you're going to be just like her." From then on, no one talked.

Once, Luba went to the bathroom to wash the grease off of her hands before the next meal. A soldier told her to stop because she wasn't supposed to wash her hands. He started to hit her. Luba said "shoot me in the back!" The soldier said, "I'm not going to kill you. You're going to get killed, but not by me."

Everyday something else happened. They had to wait outside for two hours and then they went to work every morning. They worked day shifts and night shifts. The day shifts were good compared to the night shifts. On every night shift, the bosses of the factory would pick out about twenty-five girls and bring them upstairs. The girls were given pails of water to wash themselves. Luba was scared because her body was not fully developed like those of all the other girls. She was shaking because the soldiers were watching them. One of the Nazis shooed her and told her to leave. She was so relieved; she grabbed her clothes and ran. Luba quickly got dressed and was on the way back to work. Along the way, a man asked her "what did they do to you?" Another girl came down stairs and the man asked her the same thing. The other girl said, "They almost killed me." All of the other girls had been raped. Girls were taken up stairs every night; some of them were injured so badly that they wouldn't stop bleeding and were sick. Then they would be sent to Auschwitz.

After that year, the Nazis took the Jews to a bigger camp. This camp made big artillery like bombs and missiles. The day before, the Nazis took twenty of the girls into the cleaned out workroom. The Nazi official named Meschner supervised their work. Luba recalls Meschner as a "Hitler". The girls were given big buckets full of bullets. They were ordered to take out the gunpowder. The Nazis wanted them to handle the poisonous powder, which would slowly kill them. Fortunately, Luba only had to empty the bullets for two days; otherwise she would have surely died. As Luba worked she grew very tired. From a window on the upper floor, a Nazi saw her falling asleep. A girl pushed Luba to wake her up. The Nazis lead the girls upstairs. They made the girls lay, strapped down on tables. Their limbs were spread out. The Nazis began hitting them. After beating her, the Nazis wanted to see if Luba was alive or could remember anything. They sat her in a tall chair under two bright lights. They said asked her questions, which she answered. They then took her down stairs and splashed water on her. Luba ran. She didn't know where to go, so she ran into the men's bathroom. She slept under the sink all night. When she woke up, it was dark. A Jewish man saw her and called another Jewish man in. They told Luba that they had been looking for her the day before. They then switched clothes with her. They called the guard that Luba knew.

Luba was taken to a camp called Werke. At Werke, the Jews could talk to each other because the Nazis were outside the big electric fence surrounding the camp. Werke was another ammunitions camp. The Jews worked as slave labor and other Polish people worked as paid labor. Luba went close to the fence even though she was very frightened. She yelled to a Polish man on the other side of the fence to ask him where he was from. She asked him to go to the town where she used to live and bring her some new clothes and provisions. He agreed and the next day Luba gave him her old address. Eventually the Polish man returned with clothes and a note from Luba's father. The note said that her family was living in a hidden wall in the house.

In 1942 one of Luba's cousins came to Werke. Her cousin told her that on the day of Yom Kippur the Nazis took all the Jews out of their houses. They didn't bother taking the old people out – instead they killed them on the spot. The Nazis killed all of them. Luba's cousin told her that he had buried her parent's bodies. She wondered what had happened to her siblings. Along with the appalling news, her cousin also brought Luba her family's jewelry. Luba refused to take it. She did not want the Nazis to see her with it. Her cousin gave it to other Jews. However, a week later the Nazis took any jewelry from the Jews. Luba was so scared she could hardly breathe.

Between 1943 and 1944, Luba was taken to Chenstohova. Luba thought it was a relatively good camp because the barracks were upstairs from where they worked. This meant that they didn't have to wait outside for two hours every morning. The kitchen was not too far away and they were given a bit more to eat. The Jews would not drink their coffee in the morning. They formed groups and gave all the coffee to a different person each day because there was not enough for everyone. They would wash their hair with the coffee to soothe the scrapes and bites on their scalps.

After Chenstohova, the Jews were all being sent to Germany. Luba had been sharing a bunk bed with another girl who was about twenty-five years old and very pretty. The girl fell in love with one of the Polish cooks. The cook would come up stairs to the barracks to visit the girl. They had sexual relations, but when Luba asked what was going on, the girl told her it was nothing and that she was too young for it. The girl brought Luba soup and, although initially refusing, Luba ate it. The Nazis were putting chemicals in the soup so that the girls would not get their periods. The cook knew that they were moving to Germany. He had Luba and the girl hide in a closet. Luba wanted to leave so she came out of the closet. She stacked some storage boxes and climbed out of the building through a small window. The Nazis saw her running and asked if anyone else was still in the building. Luba told them she was the last one and the soldier hit her.

Next, Luba was sent to Bergen-Belsen where her duty was cleaning small planes. Luba had to wait outside in the snow for three hours. The soldiers gave each Jew a number, which they had to remember. Luba was afraid she would forget her number so she wrote it in the snow with her toe: 143683. The next day the Nazis didn't call out names for roll call – they called out numbers. Anyone who couldn't remember his or her number was taken away. The Nazis went from room to room giving the Jewish girls nightgowns. They gave the tall girls short gowns and the short girls long gowns. A tall girl in line next to Luba wanted to trade gowns with her, but Luba refused. The long gown was much warmer. The girls were told to leave everything except their shoes to go into the big room they would be sleeping in. The Jews had to sleep on the floor. Everyone sat down, huddled for warmth, and fell asleep. Luba remembered it as being "huddled together like herring." It was so crowded that if someone wanted to roll over, everyone had to move. When Luba woke up the next morning, she was so stiff that she could not get up. She started crying. The other girls said, "They're going to kill you," but they wanted to help her. The girls rolled Luba onto her stomach and stepped on the back of her knees. The girls helped Luba walk to the line, the Nazis asked her for her number, and she survived. Luba stayed at Bergen-Belsen for four months.

The Nazis began moving Luba's group to another location. The Jews had to walk all the way there, escorted by Nazi soldiers. They were starving because they weren't eating. They walked through the snow, day and night. They were very lightly clothed and Luba did not understand how they managed not to get sick.

Eventually they ran into another group of men. They had to stay at under cover, walk slow, and walk mostly at night to stay hidden from the Russians. Then, fighting broke out. The girl next to Luba got shot, so they left her for dead. The Americans came to help half a day later. The Russians had overcome the Nazis who had been with the group of Jews. By that time, poor Luba was practically dead. They took the worn Jews to Feldafing, a displaced persons camp for Jewish refugees. A Russian man picked Luba up and carried her. He laid her down on a bed and covered her with a blanket. He told her that she must eat and he said, "You are free." He left for a while and then came back to see how she was feeling. Luba did not want to come out and be seen with him. She just wanted to sleep. She was very surprised and delighted by the warm blanket and pillow. Luba made friends with a Jewish man because she mistook him for her brother. They talked together about their experiences for hours. Soldiers came from Israel to get the Jews to come with them but Luba had her heart set on going back to Poland. Luba's new friend left to Palestine.

In Feldafing, Luba encountered two Jewish men with casts around their chests and torsos. She asked them what they had been doing but they did not want to tell her. Eventually, they told her that their job had been to gas people. One of the men told her a story. He recalled having three hundred small children. They were running out of time, so they had to hold the children by their arms and legs and toss them into a flaming oven. As they were about to throw another child in, one little boy stepped forward and pointed to the furnace saying "don't throw him in there! It's too hot in there!" When Luba and others heard about it, they all cried together. After the war, the Russians took the men to the hospital where they were given medicine and casts for their burnt bodies. The men were mentally scarred, which is why they had not wanted to share the story with Luba.

Not too long after, Luba found a small group of Jews who wanted to travel to Poland just like she did. One of them was a woman who wanted to go back to find the baby that her deceased sister had left behind. A man told Luba not to go with them. Different people were living in those houses now and it was not safe. He told her to go the next time. The group went to the woman's house first in search of the baby. She saw the child, who was now five or six, and called to her. The child did not respond because she did not recognize the woman and she had been given a new name. When the woman went inside to ask for the child, the people living in the house killed her, thinking that she was alone and no one would come looking for her. The group was hidden and waiting for her to return, but when a long time passed, they got worried and separated to look for her. One of them found her dead body under a tree in the backyard. After the incident, the group returned to the same Russian camp and told Luba and her friends the story. Luba decided to wait.

A few months later, one of Luba's cousins came to the camp. He told her that their town had been flattened – no more houses. Luba knew that her whole family was gone. Dwight D. Eisenhower came to check on Feldafing. He was asked where the Jews should be sent. They

would have sent them back to where they came from, but it was not safe. So Eisenhower said "send them to America." Luba wondered what she would do in America. She would have preferred going to Israel, but David Keller, her boyfriend, had relatives in America. David wrote a letter to his uncle in New York. David told his uncle that Luba was his wife because he knew that they would not have supported her accompanying him if she was merely a girlfriend. On the immigration papers Luba Schwartz and David Keller became Mr. and Mrs. Keller. On the papers, Luba estimated and recorded her birthday as May 15, 1926, but the actual date is unknown.

The new couple took the second Marine Flasher on March 14, 1947. Luba found out that she had aunts living in Queens, New York. Her aunts wanted to give Luba and David two hundred dollars but David's family refused, so she spent it on clothes for them. When Luba told them that she and David never properly got married, the family planned a wedding and held a religious ceremony.

Getting used to her new life was hard for Luba. She got sick and had painful cramps. She cried and cried until her family took her to a doctor who was a specialist. The doctor told her she was going to have a baby. She had been enslaved for years and felt terrible – she didn't want to have a baby! Just the same, nine months later she had her first son in a furniture room. At first, the baby cried and cried. Luba did not know how to take care of him because she had never been around babies. Her aunt helped her and taught her how to raise him. Twenty-eight months later the doctor told Luba to she would be having another baby. Three and a half years after Luba's second son, the doctor told her that she would be having a third child. After Luba had her third son, she told the doctor that if he told she was going to have one more baby, she would throw herself off of the third story of the building.

Luba Keller went on to live her life with her new family and was offered a job. After coming to America, Luba would lie in bed and wonder how the Holocaust could have happened. She wondered why people do such terrible things to each other. In 1996, Luba and her family moved to California. Since then, she has been volunteering multiple times a week and has raised a countless amount of money for her synagogue. Luba Keller went on to share her experiences and tell *her* story about the unforgettable Holocaust.

Margot Lobree

By Devon Fernandez and Audrey Harris

"Close your eyes for a moment and imagine coming home tonight and your parents have your suitcase packed…" This is what Margot Lobree experienced on one night in April of 1939 that drastically changed her life. The Holocaust, which occurred between 1938 and 1945, was a horrific genocide of people that the Hitler regime determined should not live. Some were forced into concentration camps, others were killed.

Margot Lobree spent the first 13 years of her life in Frankfurt, Germany, where she lived with her parents and older brother. Both of her parents were born and raised in rural villages of Germany, and ultimately decided to raise *their* children in the large Jewish community of Frankfurt. There, they were accepted and felt comfortable practicing their religion freely. Her family was considered conservative and attended synagogue on holidays. Margot and her brother went to an orthodox school where, until leaving Germany, enjoyed time with all types of friends.

The community in Frankfurt, both Jewish and non-Jewish, typically got along -until 1933, when Hitler came into power and segregation became more widely known. "We had friends today who couldn't talk to us tomorrow," Margot said. In 1935, Margot's father was forced to give up his business due to discrimination, which left the family in a state of financial stress. Margot and her family planned to leave for South America until her father fell ill and passed away on January 5, 1938.

Due to difficulties in Germany, Margot's mother put her on a Kindertransport that would take her to England to safeguard her from possible concentration camps in April, 1939. During this time, Margot's brother attended a program that prepared him to go to Israel. On the train, Margot brought clothes, a sewing kit and 40 grams of silver, but she knew no one. The traumatizing experience left her with a mental block where she does not remember saying good-bye to her mother.

Margot arrived in London and stayed with a Jewish family. The family was made up of two parents, a 16-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter, who saw Margot as cheap labor. The daughter even wore some of Margot's clothes, even though she interacted very little with the children. She spent most of her time with the maid, who was very kind towards her. Margot did chores each day. At this time, Margot kept in touch with her mom through letters that were first sent to Switzerland, and then to Germany. During the Blitz, the family left Margot in London with the maid while they evacuated to a safer place.

From 1940 to 1942, Margot stayed in a girl's refugee hostel called Rusthall Beacon, Tumbridge Wells, UK. She made many close friends in there, and has kept in touch with several of them. In 1942, Margot returned to London for two more years.

She had two uncles in San Francisco with whom she maintained contact, and a friend of theirs volunteered to write to her also. Margot and this friend, Charles David Lobree, became pen pals for eight and a half years. She was 14, he was 20. In 1944, she left London to move to New

York to live with relatives. David told Margot he would get a chance to call her so that they could speak for the first time. Scheduling this was difficult as he was in the Navy and stationed near Chicago. On the day he was supposed to call, Margot waited and waited, oblivious to the time difference. She became impatient and left the house before she could receive the phone call.

In the summer of 1948, Margot's uncles sent her money to visit them in San Francisco. She arrived on a Saturday and David picked her up from the airport. His mom invited Margot to stay with them and, two days later, he proposed to her and she said yes. She stayed in San Francisco for three weeks, went back to New York for seven weeks, and, the day after she arrived a second time, they went to Reno and got married.

In the United States, Margot lost contact with her mother, and the rest of her family. She later found out that her grandmother died in a concentration camp called Theresienstadt and her aunt in Auschwitz. She never figured out where or how her mother had died. In 1996, Margot went back to visit Frankfurt, where a statue stands commemorating all the Holocaust victims from Frankfurt and their place of death. Under her mother's name, it stated "destination unknown." Margot remained in contact with her brother, but didn't get to see him for 25 years.

Margot and David lived in Redwood City for 53 and a half years. She received a college degree from Cañada College in Redwood City and has been a travel agent for 34 years. She has two sons named Lindsey and Bruce. Lindsey lives in North Carolina with his wife, and Bruce lives in Seattle, Washington with his two sons, Seth and Marc. They have all heard her story and admire her courage throughout her experience. She has since moved to North Carolina to be closer to her family.

Thinking back on her experience, Margot has realized that she was deprived of the security of a childhood. "Even though I never had the scars of a concentration camp and I always had a roof over my head, there are other scars." However, she has made peace with her experience and has given public speeches to show the importance of the Holocaust. Margot realizes that she "has a history and needs to tell that history." She has learned that something so horrific must never happen again. She believes that everyone should be broadminded and liberal.

Margot's story is an inspirational one that has given us a new perspective into the Holocaust and has enhanced our previous knowledge. It was a great honor to hear a firsthand experience of the Holocaust and to document it for the future generation. We believe that Margot's story along with those of other Holocaust survivors should be heard so people can understand the effects of discrimination and how it relates to us today.

Edith Marx Trevino

By Valarie Makovkin

Never Recovered

I learned about the opportunity to interview a Holocaust survivor through my AP history teacher. I was immediately intrigued. I have studied the Holocaust in school on multiple occasions and had always felt a compassion for what happened to the Jewish people in Germany. When I finally signed up, I was assigned to interview a survivor named Edith. Though she was only 3 years old when the extermination of the Jewish people started, she had very interesting stories to tell both about her life now, and the life of her mother who could never truly forget the brothers she lost in the concentration camps.

When I asked Edith about her experience in the Holocaust, the only memories she had to offer were the ones her mother, Maldhid, had told her. She said her mother brought her and her brother over to the United States by ship from a port in France. She said her mother searched for her brothers in Germany after the war ended and was mortified when she discovered that they had been killed. I once had a dream that my brothers had died. It was absolutely terrifying. When I awoke from that dream, I had to go check their rooms just to make sure they were okay. I thought to myself later after the interview, "If it hurt that bad when my brothers died in my nightmares, how bad would it feel if they died for real?" Edith's mother knew what that felt like; according to Edith, her mother "never fully recovered."

Edith taught first grade in a school in Germany for a while. While she was there, she met a young German girl who asked her a number of questions about her time during the Holocaust, how it affected her, and how sorry she was that it ever happened. It seemed to Edith that the girl was trying to make up for it in a way, maybe because she felt guilty. Edith really didn't mind. At the very least, she had someone to tell her stories to. Edith still writes letters to her every Christmas.

Edith's most interesting stories came from the Holocaust survivor group she attends. One of the most fascinating stories was about two survivors that had coincidentally both been in the internment camps. As they began to talk, they noticed a similarity in the descriptions of the camp. They showed each other their arms to verify, and, indeed, they had been held at the same camp. The fact that the two coincidentally attended the same Holocaust survivor group seemed miraculous to me. In a way, the two were like the twins from *Parent Trap* that met by accident at a summer camp. Edith's faced lit up when she told me this story, as did mine.

So how did Edith's mother get through the years with the horrible burning pain of loss? Family. Without the love from a caring husband and children, Edith's mother wouldn't have been able to do the things she needed to do to stay alive. The pain of losing a loved one is something one will never forget. Their ghosts will never disappear. That is why you have friends and family. They are the ones that keep you alive when your brothers are killed in concentration camps, and the ones you check in the middle of the night to make sure they haven't died.

Humans are born with compassion, I believe. When one can hold on to it during their most desperate times, that is what makes a survivor, a survivor.

Ruth Willdorff

By Caitlyn Fernandez and Lauren Meier

Ruth Willdorff, a Palo Alto resident, grew up in Europe during World War II and had a life that reads like an adventure novel. Unfortunately, the novel includes some extremely awful and appalling times. We were honored to be able to spend a couple of hours with Ruth through the Holocaust Memorial Project. She is one of the few remaining Jewish survivors from the small town of Mayen, Germany. She was born in Germany and was the only child of parents who owned a clothing and shoe store. There was a small population of Jews in this town.

In 1933, Ruth and her parents moved to the town of Kalkar near the Dutch border where her grandparents had a store, when her father took over the management.

She studied at a Jewish school and attended wonderful Shabbats with the other seventeen Jewish families. Every Shabbat, many Jewish families and travelers gathered at her house for a wonderful celebration.

Mrs. Willdorff remembers when people would not shop at their store after it was boycotted by the Nazis. The butcher next door to her family's shop started a riot and turned many of the townspeople against the Jews. Her family later had to close their shop because of the anti-Semitism. Before that, the Jewish families had very good relationships with the non-Jews in town. She remembers when Hitler, a short man as she recalls, was appointed in 1933. That is when it all began to change.

Mrs. Willdorff always used to ride the train to school with her friend. After the anti-Semitism began, Hitler's youth would beat her and her friends on the train daily. Because of this, her father started driving them to school.

After Kristallnacht, when they burned the synagogue in Kalkar, Ruth's parents made the difficult decision to smuggle her into Holland, so that she could live with her uncle.

She was scheduled to leave for Holland on May 11, 1939. The Germans invaded on the tenth.

When the Germans started to send the Jews to concentration camps, Ruth went into hiding and joined the Dutch Resistance. She used the pseudonym Maria Peterson. Mrs. Willdorff spent eight months in hiding, knowing that she was one day away from some of the worst times of her life. In order to earn her stay with the family hiding her, she took on the job of cleaning and cooking for a three-year-old boy. She lived her days with hope and had the courage and strength to keep going. One day the Gestapo came and arrested her.

Mrs. Willdorff was put into a camp called Bergen Belsen. She was shoved onto a cattle car filled to the top with people. Once she arrived at her destination, she was quickly thrown out of the train onto the freezing, icy ground. She then had to walk from the train station to the camp. The Nazis counted heads over ten times for the sole purpose of forcing the Jews to endure the

cold. While this situation was incredibly unfortunate, Mrs. Willdorff is thankful that upon arriving at the camp, she was never tattooed with a number, her head was not shaved, and she got to keep her clothing. Mrs. Willdorff was also given the privilege of working in the S.S. kitchen. She often stole sausage, onions, and other items from the kitchens and shared her stolen food with some family and close friends, who were sworn to secrecy. Aside from this minor form of nutrients, they were also given some potato skins and, occasionally, spinach for dinner. At night, Mrs. Wildorff slept in the barracks that held 100 women in four-tier beds. While she was happy being able to sleep in the top bunk, Mrs. Willdorff got bed bugs in her legs and was covered from head to toe in lice.

Mrs. Willdorff knew only rumors about what was happening around the rest of Europe. People were dying around her, but she managed to survive. She would later learn that there were invasions by Americans and Europeans and British fighting to liberate Europe. "I knew which plane was which- German, British, or American." Thinking that she was going to another camp, the officers shoved her and many other camp residents into a kettle car. Little did she know, this car was headed for the nearest lake, with the intention of drowning all passengers. The Americans thought that this was a car filled with Jews being taken to another concentration camp, so they bombed the train and rescued all of the Jews.

On Friday, April 13, 1945, Ruth was freed. For many people the number thirteen is unlucky, but for Ruth it is a blessed and fortunate number. She was kindly cared for by American soldiers and Red Cross. They were shocked to find that her legs were terribly swollen with holes from the bed bugs.

Ruth went to New York City in July of 1946. She later met up with her father in San Francisco and they began to rebuild their lives. Mrs. Wildorff also met her new stepmother for the first time, whom she appreciated greatly for all her help and care. The horrors of the war were always on her mind and it took a long time to emotionally get over it. Ruth met and married her husband, Rene, at the San Francisco Jewish Community Center in 1950. Rene had spent the war safely in Shanghai. Together, they raised two daughters: Betty, who lives in Los Altos, and Deborah, who lives in Palos Verdes Estates.

Ruth had spent most of her life not speaking of her experiences. The first time Ruth recalls talking about it was when her granddaughter Stephanie, now twenty-three, had asked her about it at age seven. Ruth is a proud grandmother of Stephanie, along with her other three grandsons, Adam, Ethan, and Brian.

We are grateful for the time Ruth spent with us and she has inspired us to make sure people are always aware of the atrocities of the Holocaust. She has moved us to think of others always. After all that she was forced to endure, Ruth continues to strive. When asked how she manages to cope from day to day, Ruth simply stated her life's motto: "Living well is the best revenge," which she continues to live everyday.

Assemblymember Mike Feuer
District 42

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Mary Bauer	*Interviewed by Alexandra Glancy*
Regina Hirsch	*Interviewed by Eva Levy and Tatiana Spottiswoode*
Erika Jacoby	*Interviewed by Ellina Chulpaeff*

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Mary Bauer

By Alexandra Glancy

Mary Bauer's Life Before, During, and After the Holocaust

The first piece of information Mrs. Mary Bauer offered to me when we sat down for an interview was, "Did you know that African Americans have been in concentration camps?" Not only does Mary find importance in sharing her Holocaust survival story, but she values education about and action against prejudice against all groups of people. I am privileged to take part in sharing her story, which she hopes will teach a lesson of tolerance.

Mary Bauer, born Mary Izsak, lived a comfortable life in the big city of Budapest, Hungary. She was born on May 29th, 1927, an only child of her two parents. Seven generations Hungarian, she did not foresee the abruptness that would destroy lifestyles like hers for Jews across Europe.

Living in the city, religion was not that big of an issue for her and her parents. Mary attended public high school, and her father even enrolled her in Catholic school one year so that she could explore different religions. Although she attended a reform synagogue every Friday night with her family, compared to her father's eight brothers, she was not very religious. She did, however, celebrate the Jewish high holidays with her innumerable cousins every year in the various villages they lived in.

Hints of hostility towards Jews were always apparent growing up in Hungary, a fairly anti-Semitic country. Her father was trained as a doctor, but after getting beat up at his university, he decided, as Mary put it, "If they beat me up, why should I heal the bastards?" He ended up practicing business with a couple of his brothers so that his family could lead a nice, upper-middle class lifestyle.

Mary recalls seeing Hitler on the newsreel before movies, and all she could think was "why is this man so angry?" As the rumors of the Nazi Final Solution started spreading through Hungary in the 40's, one escapee from Poland or Austria warned Mary's father of what was to come. Mary's father was told to pack up and leave his content life in Budapest, but he could not understand why he would have to leave, where he would go, or how he could leave his business. Those warnings, though unbelievable, were correct, for in 1942, her father was taken to a labor camp in Romania and never came back.

Starting in 1943, Mary remembers feeling uncomfortable in school. Her group of friends started keeping their distance. During recess her classmates would push her, spit on her, and one day someone marked a swastika, the Nazi symbol, on the back of her shirt. She felt very upset and did not understand why the kids she was friendly with a month ago were now discriminating against her. The day the Germans invaded Hungary, a boy stole her bicycle. Harsher hostility towards the Jews spread quickly, for when Mary's mother approached the principal of the school about Mary's bicycle, the principal responded, "She will have to give up more than that."

Neighbors' compliance with the ideas rushing into Hungary troubled Mary, and made it even tougher to live like they had before.

The laws against and eventual deportation of Jews in Hungary all happened drastically within a month. The Germans were losing the war, and they wanted to get rid of the Jews as quickly as possible. In fact, the deportations of Hungarian Jews to the concentration camps occurred within same week of April 1944 as the Battle of Normandy.

Numerous laws were enacted prohibiting Jews from normal daily life, such as: Jews must wear a yellow star, Jews cannot hire help for their home such as gardeners or maids, Jewish doctors cannot treat gentiles. After this, Mary and her mother were resettled into the ghetto for a short period of time. Hunger was the main concern for those in the ghetto. Women fought in the kitchen over food. The sanitary conditions were also despicable.

The women of the ghetto underwent an inspection on deportation day in April, 1944. Mary vividly remembers soldiers checking in ears, nostrils, and even a woman's vagina for jewelry. Her earrings were ripped out of her earlobes, and she was bleeding as they marched to the train station from where she would be deported.

In her suitcase Mary brought a doll form her doll collection that she loved, photographs of her family, and snack food. She was still with her mother, grandmother and grandfather. Her grandmother brought a Hebrew prayer book, while her grandfather brought his medals from World War I. He assumed that since he was a hero in the Hungarian army, he would be excused from the deportation. Little did he know, he was no longer considered Hungarian; his being Jewish made his Hungarian heroism and patriotism insignificant.

Upon arriving at Auschwitz, Mary was given no time to recuperate from the horrifying three day journey she spent in a stuffed boxcar. Upon arrival, she remembers screaming in both German and Hungarian, for the Nazis coordinated the welcoming in anticipation of the country the transport was from. Mary felt tremendous fear of the unknown. After a couple of frantic minutes, a separation appeared in the group between men and women. This would be the last time she saw her grandfather. Her grandmother was sent to her death in the gas chambers during the selection.

Mary remembers wearing her brand new banana colored wool coat, loafers, and braids in her hair on her journey to Auschwitz. Upon arriving, though, she and her mother were herded into a large room where they were ordered to undress entirely and remove any pins in their hair. This was an extremely humiliating experience; she had never even seen her own mother naked before, let alone hundreds of women.

The women were taken through a three step process. First, their hair, armpits and pubic hair were shaved off. It was hard to recognize her mother among the bald figures all around her. Next, she was rubbed with a disinfecting sponge all over her body, and finally she was marked with a tattoo. This was a remarkably dehumanizing process, for both hair and a name, features of individuality, were removed. Everyone was only known as "Juden," despite whoever they were in their day-to-day lives only a couple of weeks earlier.

Mary's number in Auschwitz was A10360. The "A" means "2nd hundred thousand," something she did not find out until much later in her life. Her tattoo, unlike the crooked ones of earlier inmates, is completely aligned, showing the experience the Nazis had in branding the digits on each inmate's forearm. She unsuccessfully tried to rub off the tattoo with some dirt after receiving it; she was "unfamiliar with tattoo culture."

In Auschwitz, Mary worked in the weavery. She wove the hair shaven from the heads of Jewish women into fuses for bombs and dynamite for the German war effort. The hair was also collected to stuff mattresses or upholstery.

Every day in Auschwitz only one thing was on her mind: hunger. She learned to cook hearing the women in her barrack orally exchanging recipes. Vivid descriptions of home-cooked meals and her mother beside her were the two things that kept her going while in the camp. Mary only weighed 76 lbs. when the Holocaust was over.

In January 1945, Mary and her mother were forced to take a Death March from Poland to Ravensbruck in Germany. She recalls the horrifying contrast of fresh blood in the white snow and stepping over dead bodies. She was not allowed to stop, and she and her mother were both threatened with death by officers at least once for not moving fast enough. Of those initially with them, 75 percent died during the march that only lasted one and a half days.

In Ravensbruck, the Germans were very unorganized. Mary and her mother slept on the ground. Mary was lying next to a person who was coughing blood, so her mother switched places with her so that Mary would not get sick. Because of this selfless act of protection, Mary's mother ended up getting TB, the disease that would weaken her for the rest of her life.

After Ravensbruck, Mary and her mother were sent to another camp together. From that camp, which was in the district of Mecklenburg, Germany, they were liberated. (Mary secretly wishes that the Americans, not the Russians, had liberated her, for the American soldiers were rumored to bring Hershey chocolate bars and other treats. Nevertheless, of course she was grateful). In May 1945, she and her mother journeyed from Mecklenburg to Berlin and then to Hungary. When Mary went back to Hungary to finish her high school education, her house was looted. She saw one of her old neighbors wearing the hat that her grandma knitted for her for when she would go ice-skating. Mary was shocked that the members of her community recovered from her disappearance quickly enough to steal her things. But Mary realized that those objects had less significance now after what she had gone through.

Mary traveled to Berlin and her mother promised she would meet up with her later, because her mother was very sick. But when the Russians closed the borders, Mary's mother was caught in Hungary, and they were unable to see each other for five years. Mary was extremely lucky to have been with her mother throughout the war, but she was not ready to go on without her. She regretted how although she was physically liberated, she felt barred from establishing a new life without her mother because of more political complications. She waited in Berlin for those five years until her Mother encouraged her to go to America without her.

When asked where in America she wanted to go, Mary was smart enough not to say New York where she would be destined for a poor life living in a tenement. She decided on California, so if she were poor, she could at least go to the beach and movie theatres.

She arrived in New Orleans from a boat carrying European refugees. Her first impression of America, the land of the free, was the prejudice alive in the segregated city. She was extremely frustrated, just coming from a childhood abruptly interrupted by the evils of discrimination. As she observed the two different bathrooms for "Black" and "White," she was shocked, thinking, "This is America?" She tried to speak up about it, but a woman told her to shut up because, since it was the McCarthy era, she could be taken for a communist. Intolerance was just as alive in America as it had been in Europe, and that was very crushing for Mary.

Mary married her late husband, an Austrian who moved to Israel and participated in the Haganah, the underground forces for Israeli independence. She had two sons. She was very resentful towards the fact that her sons would have no extended family, nor a concept of cousins like she appreciated in her childhood. She constantly yearned for her mother to be there helping her with her new family. Seventeen years went by since 1944 until Mary saw her mother once again. They only saw each other for a short six-week period, and her mother died in Hungary many years later.

Mary needs to live her daily life with the constant reminder of her past tattooed on her arm. Even in the tolerant city of Los Angeles, she still wears long sleeves because the questions addressed to her about her tattoo remind her of the isolation she felt as a Jewish girl in Europe. She will never be settled with what happened to her in the Holocaust, and she views her life today as a "perpetual mourning." Mary never had a smooth transition from girlhood to womanhood. She didn't have teenage years to experiment with dating and maturity. Because of the challenges thrust upon her, she can never forgive those who stood idly by while the Jews perished, but she does not hold a grudge against the third generation of Germans for the weakness of their grandparents.

Now, Mary continues to educate herself about all sorts of prejudices, not only those against Jews. She is extremely involved in Holocaust education, and she values any sort of enlightenment that education can bring to one's life. Mary does not passively accept the notion of genocide, and rather continues to analyze what she experienced in the Holocaust. At 82 years old, she currently does the accounting for an immigration law office, where she enjoys talking with foreigners like herself that feel uncomfortable with English. Mary's passion for life after the destruction she witnessed is an inspiration to us all.

Regina Hirsch

By Eva Levy and Tatiana Spottiswoode

The Luckiest Kid in The World

1939. The year that changed her life forever.

She looked around her and saw people pouring into the streets from every side; families that were generations of children and parents and grandparents all carrying everything they could through the rough winter streets. She looked at her own family: two parents, nine children, several of whom were married and already had children of their own. As they walked on, she felt the ominous stares of the policemen and the tears freezing on her face. Her stomach growled with hunger, but she ignored it, dismissing it like she would do for the many months and years to come. She and the many people around her were all marching towards the ghetto that would house them for the next few years. It was the beginning of an event that would change her life forever.

Although never a typical twelve-year-old, Regina Hirsch's pre-war experience was like any loved and protected child's. She shared a comfortable home with her mother, father, and eight siblings. Her father was a pious, intelligent, but unsuccessful businessman, so they never had a lot of money. But despite financial difficulties, Regina grew up happily, attending public school in their Jewish community, playing with friends, and reading. She wanted books to surround her and wished for a library more than anything else. Regina's personality was generous and giving by nature and whenever she had anything, she would want to give it to someone less fortunate. She always had incredible foresight; since she was little she would save little pieces of her bread or meals in case she was hungry another time, or saw someone who needed it more than she did. Because of this, she ended up not eating much and was always a small, slim girl.

On September 1st, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. With his invasion, he soon moved all of the Jews into ghettos, where they experienced intolerable living situations, with fifteen people crammed into a tiny apartment room. A little prior to this, Regina's mother had received a tip from a neighbor that they would have to move out of their apartment. Since her parents had fifty US dollars, they decided to buy a little room in part of the ghetto just to be safe. Those fifty dollars served them well; as more Jews were forced into the ghetto, the overpopulation left many without a place to sleep. When the moves were still not permanent, another friend tipped them off that the Germans were sending in people to clear out the apartments. Because of this warning, Regina's family moved all of their valuables into their apartment in the ghetto and was therefore able to save their possessions. One of her nine siblings, Sally, had been staying in Warsaw, but when her mother heard that there might be something going on, she decided to bring her back and paid a man with a horse and cart to bring Sally back.

When the Germans invaded Lodź, they had swept all kinds of people into the ghettos without discriminating by profession, only making sure that they were Jews. Within the first couple of weeks in the ghetto, Regina, at age 12, got very sick with typhoid. Although she was

very sick of a highly contagious disease, with the help of the many doctors that were in the ghetto and a few that were outside, she managed to survive through it. At first Regina's mother cried and asked the doctor not to tell anyone that Regina had typhoid, because she was afraid they would take her away, and the doctor said he would not. But on April 1, 1940, the Germans closed the Lodź ghetto (called Litzmannstadt by the Germans) and Regina, only semi-conscious, was dragged through the street on a stretcher and taken to a makeshift hospital. There she awoke and found herself in a bathtub full of ice, and a girl next to her told her, "You are the luckiest kid in the world, because yesterday the Gestapo came to the hospital and took away all of the doctors, nurses and patients, and shot them." She had missed the killings by one day.

There were about 168,000 Jews who came to the Lodź ghetto, and after four years only 60,000 of them survived. Regina lived in the ghetto for four and a half years and experienced many near-death experiences that she was saved from only by a series of miracles, which Regina says marked her experiences throughout the Holocaust. Like all of the Jews in the ghettos, Regina and her family used ration cards to get the little food they were allotted. The lines for the food were typically extremely long, and Regina often had to stand there for hours in order to get anything at all. One cold morning, Regina heard from one of her neighbors that they were selling cabbage at the corner store and that the line was very short. Although she didn't quite believe her luck, she grabbed the card that was designated for cabbage and left the house. As thoughts of sharing a whole cabbage with her family for dinner filled her mind, her mouth began to water as she ran down the street. When she arrived she was shocked to see how short the line was. As she edged closer she realized the reason; the people who were going in were not leaving. Suddenly she saw the many guards who were standing surrounding the area around the store. She realized that they were there to take them away from the ghettos and their families, like they had done to many of the people she knew. She turned and ran back towards her house, barely escaping by biting the leg of the guard that tried to keep her in. She had escaped death by a little bit.

Starting in March, 1944, the Russians were outside the ghetto, and the Germans started liquidating the Jews in the ghetto, so Regina and her family started hiding. For about two months, they hid. Around July, 1944, when they found out about the deportations, Sally (who was working making uniforms while Ruth was working in a factory) told her mother to take Regina and Lilly, and hide with other Jewish people in a field of unused straw outside of the ghetto. One day, Regina began to cry because she had dropped her rain boot. Her mother said, "Don't cry – let's get out of here." So they walked out of the field, and as they returned to their house, the Germans, who had been tipped off that the Jews were hiding in the straw, came to the field and killed everyone hiding there. Regina Hirsch had been saved, again, by one minute.

Although Regina had been very lucky and escaped certain death multiple times, she did eventually get deported to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. Prior to her deportation, her family had been itinerant, frequently moving from place to place in order to avoid deportation. They had finally been caught when they were living in a cemetery with all of their belongings, living on beets. Although many of their neighbors and friends had been deported before them, they had been unable to keep in touch and had never heard of Auschwitz, although Regina could sense that the end of their journey was nearing as they reached the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau. There, the train stopped and Regina came out with her sisters Sally, Ruth, her mother, and their

youngest sister Lily. As they looked around them, they could only see the frightened faces of people from all over Europe as they awaited their fates. Many children were crying as the German police began tearing them away from their mothers and fathers. The women and men were almost immediately separated as well as a semi-random separation of the weak and the strong. As a German guard reached to take 12-year-old Lily away from her family, their mother began to fight back, and as a result, both Lily and her mother were separated from Sally, Regina and their sister Ruth. The three older sisters fought to stay with their mother and Lilly, but the guard beat them and shouted at them to "Get going! Where you are going, you don't need a mother!" The three girls were blinded by tears as the distance between them and their mother and sister increased. As hundreds of people began to stand between them, Sally, Regina and Ruth barely had time to think about their separation, as they were pulled further into the camp. The three sisters were pushed into a room, their hair was cut off and they were stripped as the guards checked every part of them, including their private parts, for hidden possessions. They were then taken to the barracks. One of the people that had been living there for a while told them to look at the red sky in the distance: "If you arrived today, your loved ones are being burned." Regina and her sisters did not believe this was true. Regina didn't believe it until much later, when they met a former Auschwitz prisoner who had worked pulling the bodies out and putting them into the ovens. This was confirmed also by the fact that they never saw the rest of their family again.

At this time, Regina was 16, Sally 18 and one half, and Ruth 15. In the barracks, there were no showers and the girls were looked over as they were each given two minutes timed to wash off with cold water in a sink. Although this was their only time to wash themselves, there was no privacy; not only were all of the girls together in the room, but there was also a female police officer there with them. The day that Regina, Sally and Ruth had arrived in Auschwitz had been on August 27, 1944. They stayed there for six weeks until October 8, 1944. The day that they had arrived had been the last transport, the last day that the Germans sent people through the actual concentration camp; if they had arrived one day later, who knows what would have happened to them. Since the three of them were intelligent and hard-working, they managed to survive throughout their six weeks in Auschwitz. The hardest thing for the young girls was the immeasurable hunger. The girls often cried from hunger and by October 8th, with the combined lack of food from their experience in the ghetto and that in Auschwitz, the three would have been considered starved and their bodies became deformedly thin from starvation. On their last day in Auschwitz, the three girls, along with 200 other women there, were put naked into a single-file line, from which the guards separated them into two groups, one to the left and one to the right. She was told that the man directing the separation was Dr. Mengele. Sally had always been intelligent and observant and as soon as she saw that they were separating anyone who seemed to be family or friends or who was standing next to another person, she figured out the system of separation, making it so that Regina, she and Ruth all ended up together after the separations. This was another example of the amazing luck that the three had experienced over the past couple of years. Although they had no idea what to expect next, they were comforted by the fact that at least they would be together. Their group was divided up and taken on trains to another factory, where Regina, Sally and Ruth, along with around twenty others, worked in the Oederan ammunition factory in Saxony.

Regina didn't believe it when she saw their new work place. Upon arrival the girls were shown into a neat dining room where Regina had the best meal she had eaten in months – a piece of bread and a little bit of soup. The best they could hope for was that the Italian war prisoners next door might throw a bit of bread to them. The Germans were forbidden to give them any food, and were afraid even to talk to them, asking them questions such as, are you human or are you an animal from the forest? Their new quarters had five girls per bunk bed, but they were allowed to wash with warm water. The three sisters adopted into their sleeping group another girl who had been separated from her mother and was crying for her. Regina, her sisters, and the other girls all worked making ammunition. Ever careful not to be caught by a guard, Regina tried to sabotage her work in the hope that the grenade she was making would not go off. A new woman in charge who came from Auschwitz forced the girls to greet her formally and abused them if they misbehaved, but conditions were still greatly improved from those they had previously experienced in Auschwitz. Regina recalls a change in the air; she could tell the war was ending. One day, a Russian army came and put the girls on a train. Sally was quite sick and Regina was afraid the trip would kill her. Although the guards suggested that Sally stay because she did not seem strong enough to survive, Sally wanted to go with her sister, scared of never seeing her again. But yet another miracle occurred; Sally survived, and her health improved steadily over the next few weeks.

Regina and her sisters lived for four years in Germany after the war, where they went back to school and worked. Sally and Ruth got married in Germany, and with their husbands were able to migrate to the United States in the spring of 1949. Regina had to stay alone in Germany for several months, but later was able to come to the United States. The United States Senate passed a bill accepting 205,000 refugees from German camps into the United States and Regina and her sisters were among the lucky ones who found themselves safely in the States, where they spent their first few years of freedom finding out who had survived and collecting the scattered remains of their community before settling down to start a new life. Although Regina had been extremely lucky in her time under the Nazis, she had lost most of her family, but she still considered herself unbelievably lucky to have survived with two of her sisters.

Today, Regina lives in a stylish apartment in Westwood. Her two sisters and several of other Holocaust survivors live a few floors away. Surrounded by supportive neighbors and family, Regina works with museums to remember the Holocaust, and participates in interactive programs with children. She feels strongly about the Holocaust and uses her ability to speak, and her caring nature to help people immortalize the memory of the six million others who lost their lives during this time. The memories she holds of her experiences during the Holocaust will remain strong in her mind and in the minds of those she shares her story with.

Erika Jacoby

By Ellina Chulpaeff

The Struggle for Survival

For any other teenager, diving into a pool is an exhilarating and carefree experience. Yet, for Erika Jacoby, diving into a pool reserved for Nazi guards was an impulse that nearly got her killed during her imprisonment at Auschwitz. Like millions of other Jewish people across Europe, Jacoby's standards of normalcy were forever changed by the Holocaust, transforming a carefree childhood of singing and running into a fight for survival.

Born to an Orthodox Jewish family in Hungary, Jacoby was the middle child surrounded by two brothers. Her mother was one of twelve children and her father was a Talmud scholar. Erika's family lived in Hungary for 500 years, thus leading her to identify herself as a Hungarian. "I was the ' cantor' at school and sang the national anthem every morning," she recalls. Her best childhood friend was her maid's daughter, a non-Jew to whom she taught Hebrew prayers. It was only as she got older that she began to notice the growing anti-Semitism in her country, with gentile boys beating up her older brother on his way to school and screams of "dirty Jew" outside her home in the middle of the night.

At age 14 Erika couldn't attend school any more because the government closed all the Jewish schools. She found solace in reading and studying languages but didn't worry too much about what was happening. Shortly after, more and more laws prohibiting Jewish people from doing certain things were put into action, making activities such as going to the park illegal. Her parents were forced to close their kosher restaurant because they could not make a living with all the new rules and regulations. Around that time Erika learned that three of her uncles were put into labor camps doing military work but not given the military rank so as not to honor the Jews. She also had three other uncles who were able to get out of Hungary at the beginning of WWII and they escaped to Mexico.

Even with hearing about her uncles and listening to the horror tales of escaped Polish Jews, Erika and her family did not know what was happening in the countries that were occupied by Nazi Germany. They did not believe the rumors about the atrocities that were committed against the Jews there. There was no free press and the Jewish leadership was also in the dark or not honest with the community about the persecutions. Because the Jacoby family did not have any connections outside of Hungary, they could not leave to go to Switzerland or any other country that would allow Jewish immigration.

When the Germans came into Hungary, the anti-Jewish laws multiplied. The Nazis would not allow Jews to travel, go to the park, or have any civil rights; many were arrested. They all had to wear yellow stars of David. Soon after, the Nazis had put all the Jews in concentrated "ghettos." Erika's two-room home now had to hold twenty people. Yet Erika loved interacting with the other children and didn't mind.

Erika's first immediate family member to go missing during the Holocaust was not in a concentration camp. Instead, it was her brother who went to a soccer match in Budapest, Hungary, the very first day the Germans came in. At the time the family did not understand why he never returned. It was later discovered that the Germans checked the railroad stations and arrested all Jews, including her brother. The family never found out what happened to him but assumed that he died.

When the Germans started to deport the Jews, Erika's mother decided to hide her family's valuables underneath the coal in the cellar. She buried her jewelry and Erika's father's beloved Talmud. The Talmud was found after the war and returned to Erika. Her mother's caution came at a good time for in a few weeks, all Hungarian Jews, except the Jews of Budapest, were shipped to Auschwitz. Every day, 5,000 of them were gassed and burned, totaling half a million Hungarian Jews killed in a few weeks.

Erika's mother decided that it would be best to send her younger son to live with his grandfather in a nearby village. They never saw him, again because when that village was deported he was taken to a camp and was shot when he could no longer walk . Erika's father left, too, but not by choice. He was a forty-seven year old man ordered by the Nazis to pack his bag to leave. Erika's mother baked cookies for him when he left. It was later discovered that he became very weak and emaciated, at which point the Nazis shot him. Erika still remembers the paleness of his skin and his gentle heart.

After her father's deportation, Erika and the others were told to pack whatever they could carry because they were going to be taken away. Erika packed her diary, favorite pictures, and a few books to entertain herself. She did not realize the miserable journey that lay ahead, thus not bringing a sweater or food.

Erika witnessed thousands of others marching with her to a brick factory where they were put to work. The harsh living conditions there included no walls in the shelter they were to live in and straw on the floor for their beds. The women made a community kitchen there, which Erika remembers as having "the best food in the world, fried onion and bread." At this point, Erika was not afraid but mostly confused.

The Hungarian soldiers accompanying the Jews said that they couldn't take any money or jewelry with them. Erika's mother took a small ring with her and gave it to a soldier in exchange for information. The soldier assured her that the Jews will go and work and the children would be taken care of by the old people, a lie.

At the brick factory Erika saw people from small villages from all around her city. She was shocked to witness her revered grandfather getting off a ghetto train unconscious. Remembering the stories her grandfather had told her as a child, Erika came up to him and told him that the Messiah was coming. She told him that the place they were going would have bread growing on trees and rivers flowing with milk, and that, more importantly, everything would be fine.

Erika and everyone spent two weeks in the brick factory and was then boarded on a railroad car which had arrived upon the hill. She, with the rest of the women, the elderly, and the children, traveled three days and three nights standing in the car without any food, water, or bathroom facilities. Erika's friend, who was just as good as Erika at everything but running, had a little sister who suffocated in the railway car because her mother could only hold a few children at once.

The three day journey was only the prelude to the horrors that were coming after. The Jewish people aboard the train did not know that they were being taken to Auschwitz, the most horrendous extermination camp. When coming off the train, "Kapos," German and other European criminals, ordered the Jews to leave all their items in the car for they could retrieve them later. Thinking back to this, Erika exclaims "We should collect a book of German lies!"

Upon entering Auschwitz, Erika and the Jews were lined up to be presented before the selector, the infamous Dr. Mengele, or "Angel of Death." Erika remembers not knowing that the way the doctor would send her meant a chance, perhaps, to survive while the other path led to the gas chambers and ultimately death. When Erika's mother wanted to stay with her grandmother, her grandmother told her to go with Erika because "it was not nice for a young girl to go alone, surrounded by so many soldiers." Thus, Erika's mother ran up to Dr. Mengele and convinced him that she should join Erika and work, not knowing that she had just bargained for her life.

Life at Auschwitz was worse than anything Erika had ever imagined. After the selection, she and the others were undressed, shaven, and sprayed with disinfectants. Naked, they were put into a dark room full of screams and panic. The next morning and like all other mornings, Erika had to wake up at four and wait five more hours until she and her barrack could be counted. The Germans provided "soup" for lunch, something Erika describes as inedible. It was only after four days that he mother convinced her to eat so she could stay alive. When Erika attempted to feed the friend who couldn't outrun her, she refused. Judy stated that she did not want to survive. Her entire family was gone and she saw no reason to live. Erika does not know exactly what happened to her but assumes she was killed after the examination before Dr. Mengele. For many years after that day, Erika dreamt of her friend Judy every night, feeling guilty that she had outrun her and left her behind. Erika had "survivor guilt."

Erika was told that the best thing was to get away from Auschwitz by getting on a working transport. Along with her mother and aunt, Erika was transferred to Plaszow, another concentration camp in Poland. There, Erika witnessed Oskar Schindler helping save Jews from the concentration camp by allowing them to work in his factory.

As Erika's mother got ill and couldn't work anymore, Erika had to hide her every day. In the morning she would put her into the garbage cans while the Germans inspected the barracks. Because the Russians were approaching on the Eastern front, Erika and her mother were sent back to Auschwitz where they were inspected by Dr. Mengele again. This time, Erika was wiser and noticed that everyone with a paper bandage on her legs was sent to die. As Erika and her mom approached the doctor, Erika quickly ripped off and her mother's bandage, thus allowing her mother to survive Mengele's selection yet again.

Back in Auschwitz again, Erika had to follow the old routine for another six weeks. She remembers a particular incident where her aunt went into the barrack that was the latrine with the holes on a board used as toilets and fell into one. She and the women had to pull her out and dressed her in a paper bag from cement, for which she was beaten. Her aunt was stripped of the paper bag and had to go on naked.

As the Russian army advanced, the Nazis prevented liberation of the Jews. Erika was transported to three other working camps. It was only in Langenbielau, Poland on May 8, 1945, that she and her mother were finally liberated by the Russians. Neither of them knew how to live a regular life anymore.

Erika could not stay in anti-Semitic Hungary and left to go to Cuba with her mother. Because she could not go to Israel to be with her fiancée, the two decided to meet in the United States, into which she was smuggled in by a pilot her mother paid off. After a lifetime of cruelty, Erika was put on the FBI's Most Wanted list because she came in illegally. She went into hiding but eventually turned herself in when she got sick. The FBI arrested her and ordered her deportation. Luckily, her family friends helped legalize her, allowing for her to stay in the United States. She was finally able to marry her fiancée in 1950. Her mother, who still lived in Cuba, later relocated to Mexico. Years later she was able to come into the US and join her daughter.

Erika currently resides in Los Angeles. She is happily married and has three children. Erika is still religious and instilled a strong faith into her children. One of her sons even became a rabbi. After all the torture she had experienced, Erika never lost hope. She became a social worker to help people. She believes that her religion gave her a personal guard that allowed her to live through indescribable moments of suffering. Erika's ability to move on with her life and retell her story gives us hope for the future. No human being should ever suffer a similar fate.

Assemblymember Tom Ammiano
District 13

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Abram "Adam" Geldman *Interviewed by David Puyandaev*
Seymour Newstadt *Interviewed by Aminatou Dabokemp*

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Abram "Adam" Geldman

By David Puyandaev

The Loud Chair

Adam had never seen such worry in his mother's face, consumed by fear and wilted from tears. She was helpless, whispering to her children that war had broken out. It was September 1, 1939. Fascist Germany had invaded Poland.

On September 9, when Adam was 17 years old, fire engulfed the city of Lublin. His parents told him to flee, so he joined a few young men with little food and almost no money. They walked 250 miles south, and months later, arrived at Rovno: on April 16. A day later, the town of Rovno was taken over by the Soviet Union. Adam had escaped the Nazis. He was saved, and he knew that he would go back and see his family again. A few weeks later, he was given that chance.

He decided to travel to Lublin. After a few days en route, the train he was on abruptly stopped. The passengers were informed that the territory was occupied by Germany. Adam then had the choice of walking to Lublin or returning to Rovno—he chose Rovno. Overcome with fear and guilt, he nevertheless persevered.

Adam graduated from high school in Rovno in 1940. In the middle of the night, after graduation, he heard someone knock on his door. When he opened it, he was met by Russian officers and immediately deported to Siberia. On the train, he met thousands of Jews, all of whom were desperate to free themselves from the cobwebs of fate and all of whom were beginning to feel disillusioned by their escape from the clutching claws of the Holocaust.

Adam had faith. He could not let it happen, let the boxcar take him away from the possibility of seeing his family. He cried. He protested. When the train stopped a few kilometers from Rovno, in the middle of a field, his desperation consumed him. He longed for an escape. When the boxcar's door opened, he left the train, but no one else followed. It looked as if he went to get some water, but he let the field of high wheat steal his presence as he fell down. His heart was racing. No one noticed him, not even the soldiers. Yet he imagined the bullets piercing through his back. The train moved on. He rose up and walked back to Rovno. He regained his freedom, but no longer had a family to share it with.

Despite his escape, he felt strangled by the loss of his loved ones, the painful vestige of the past. When Adam came to visit the house of his childhood in 1991 and 1994, he remembered the chair on which his mother sat the day the war broke out. It was empty when he returned. . Seventy years later, the wound remains open. The chair's emptiness always reminds him of the life he once had and the dear family that he lost.

Seymour Newstadt

By Aminatou Dabokemp

The Name Changer

As Szapsa sailed away from the burning country, the distant past clutched his heart with a sorrowful grip and his name dissolved into the waves of the sea.

Life in Lodz was simple and sweet. Szapsa Najstadt lived with his mother and father, Benjamin and Yetel Najstadt. Born in Belkow, Poland, Szaspa's family moved to Lodz when he was 10 years old. His parents both worked as butchers in the industrial city and provided for Szaspa and his six brothers. Szaspa would take the trolleys around the city, passing countless red brick factories on his way. The wind danced through the trolley, ruffling his hair. Every year, Szaspa anticipated New Year's, his favorite holiday, when he would be with all his family and friends. Life was good, but no one could ignore the tension growing against the Jews in his neighborhood.

He went to school in Lodz until 1939, when the Nazis took over. Szaspa and his family were given yellow stars that they were instructed to wear. His parents lost their jobs at the same time that Szaspa had to leave school. With his parents out of work, he was forced to clean the streets for the Germans. He turned 17 on May 10th of that year.

The tension grew from bad to worse the year the Nazis invaded Poland. In the spring of 1940, Szaspa's town was evacuated, and all the Jews were sent to the Lodz Ghetto. Wooden fences and barbed wire closed them all inside. They were sectioned off from the rest of the city, as if they all suffered from the plague. Nazis stood guard around parts of the fence so no one could go in or out unless permission had been granted. Friends and neighbors stayed in close proximity of Szaspa and his family, as the heat and starvation rose rapidly throughout the ghetto. Soon, though, the residents of the ghetto figured out that during the night, the guards were few. Many brave individuals would go out into the night to forage for food for their families and neighbors. It was difficult to keep track of who was coming in or out of Lodz Ghetto. It was so large, and it was easy to leave.

One day, while Szaspa was sleeping, there was an evacuation of the ghetto. They took Szaspa's entire family away, and he didn't even realize it until they were all gone.

In months, the water supplies had gone down, and there were only scraps of food left. The heat was unbearably strong and suffocating. It was as if the sun had been pulled closer to them so that it hung right on top of the ghetto, barely squashing the barbed fence. People started to go mad, diseases spread, and one year turned into eternity.

Szaspa had been living in the ghetto for an entire year and had to make a decision about what to do. He was too familiar with the poor, overcrowded conditions of the ghetto and contemplated the idea of leaving. There was no reason to stay, now that his family had been taken away to a certain death. If he stayed, he might starve. In addition, there were rumors going

around about Hitler's plans for the Jews, and they weren't very pleasant to think about. Death seemed to be lurking around every option.

Leaving was a big risk because there was still a chance that Szaspa might be shot if he were caught trying to get out, but staying in the ghetto would most assuredly lead to death. The decision was simple. What felt like a week later, Szaspa knew that if he didn't leave that day, he would never get the chance again. There weren't so many guards around that day. One way or another, the chances of getting caught would not change. He decided he would go that night. He went into his room and gathered a small pile of clothes and thrust them into a sack. All day, as the minutes passed, his doubt and dread at the thought of what he was about to do increased. The butterflies had flown away and were replaced by raging wasps that stung and bit at his conscience.

As the sun sank from the sky, Szaspa's heart beat fast and noisily and seemed to have swollen up in his throat. The air was a little cooler now, and the sun's heat could not pick at his skin. He walked toward the fence and saw where he would make his escape. The sky slowly changed from dark blue to black, and Szaspa realized it was time. He began to walk toward the fence. While doing so, he picked at the corner of the frail yellow fabric and ripped off the oppressive star. Crumpling it in one hand, Szaspa threw it back to the earth. As he did, a cool breeze ruffled his hair. Cautiously, and discreetly, Szaspa walked past the fence, out of the ghetto, away from the fire. Wafts of relief and freedom, accompanied by a bitter regret, filled his heart. Now that he was farther away from Lodz Ghetto, Szaspa walked at a more confident pace. Shifting the small sack of his clothes, he headed for the nearest town he knew. He didn't stop walking until he reached Dachau.

The road crunched beneath his feet as Szaspa headed through the small town. He recognized the small farm from his memories of going with his father to trade and buy food from the farmer. The farmer and his family had been family friends. He knew he would be welcomed here. He stepped up to the door and tentatively knocked.

Szaspa stayed in the small farmhouse behind a trick wall inside of a hidden room. The farmer and his family gave him food and water as well. Because of the danger that prowled around outside of the house, Szaspa wasn’t able to go outside. He had to stay inside the hidden room for about three years.

In the year 1945, Szaspa came to Bremerhaven, Germany. He was 22 years old. In Germany, he found help from a Jewish organization that gave him food, clothes, and shelter. Szaspa kept a low profile so as not to attract attention. Life was better than in the ghetto, but he knew that he was not safe in Germany. He wrote to his aunt in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and she sent his papers to Germany. On May 11, 1949, Szaspa embarked on a ship that would take him to New York and away from the turmoil in Germany. Once he had arrived in New York, a Jewish organization helped him find shelter. Before the end of that year, the name Szaspa was no more.

His new name was Simon Najstadt. Simon lived alone in Brooklyn. He decided to apply for citizenship in the United States. Once he was naturalized, he was able to get a job. Staying

true to his family traditions, he worked as a butcher. No news about his family had ever come to him, and the days began to grow long. After becoming a citizen, Simon changed his name again for the last time.

Seymour Newstadt now lives alone in a community of elders in San Francisco. It has been over 60 years since he arrived in New York. He is a widow. In 1987, his wife, Ruth Newstadt, died of cancer. His two grown children live in different cities: daughter Joyce lives in Florida and son Jeff lives in Berkeley. He has a granddaughter, Ruth, who is a freshman in high school. Seymour cherishes every second of her company.

His mother, father, and brothers now remain a distant memory, but the painfully intimate memory of the Holocaust will never change or fade away.

Assembly Speaker Karen Bass
District 47

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Salomon Berger	*Interviewed by Elexis Mann and Erin Chapman*
William Harvey	*Interviewed by Kaila Fonteno and LaQoia Thompson*
Morris Price	*Interviewed by Kimberly Espinal and Wayne Almendarez*

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The Museum of Tolerance, Los Angeles

KIPP Academy of Opportunity, Los Angeles

Salomon Berger

By Elexis Mann and Erin Chapman

Sol Berger the Great

On January 16, 2009 we were very fortunate to be two of the twelve students to go to Washington, DC to witness President Barack Obama's inauguration. One of the places we visited on this trip was the Holocaust Museum because we were touring as young leaders doing all we could to learn about leadership. To us, this was the most fascinating part of our journey. This was shown when the three hour trip turned into six hours because everyone was so engaged in the readings and pictures. Going to the Holocaust Museum made the experience of interviewing a real Holocaust survivor even greater a month later while back home in Los Angeles.

As we entered the Tolerance Museum in LA, we felt even more elated knowing that we were about to be in the presence of greatness. Opening the glass door gave us goose bumps because we were experiencing the chance of a lifetime. As we sat next to Mr. Berger he shook our hand and he began his story.

Born on October 28, 1919, Mr. Sol Berger was one of the nine children in his family living in Krosno, Poland. He only had seven years worth of education until he came to the U.S. He had five sisters and three brothers, and out of those five sisters, four of them left Poland in 1920, two fled to the US, and two went to Germany. One of the sisters who was in Germany died in 1928. His story began by telling us that life before the war was not easy for Jews.

"Most Jews wanted to leave Poland. Some kids wanted to leave so bad that they became shoemakers trying to go to the U.S. and Israel. At the age of 18 you had to register to be in the army. Between 1920 and 1928 half a million Jews left Poland. At that time there were spies everywhere. In 1933 Germany was a democratic country and after taking over Poland they opened the first concentration camp, and took away some citizens. The first attack occurred in 1938, the day now known as Crystal Nacht (night of the broken glass). In 1939 the German army attacked Poland, knowing that the Polish army was no match for them. Eventually Russia decided to attack Poland, leaving Poland between the attacks of both Russia and Germany. The west side of the country was occupied by Germany while two million Jews were trapped under Polish occupation. Being attacked by my own country I had to go to slave labor with my parents, my sisters, and my three brothers. All of the Jews between the ages of 14 and 25 had to go to slave labor," said Mr. Berger.

Mr. Sol Berger started an organization so that young Jewish people could resist the Germans. After starting this organization, he was arrested and after two hours of nervous beatings, he escaped. After three weeks of hiding, he was recaptured. But this time they tried to make him believe and practice Christianity, for 6 months. This would have been longer if his parents didn't bribe the Gestapo to release him.

"When I got out I heard about the ghettos the Nazis set up. No one ever thought they were to burn and gas Jews. In the ghettos we had to do slave labor, everyday, if you did not show up to work they would beat you to death. My family and I lived in the ghettos until August 10th, 1942, when the Nazis ordered for all Jews to report to the market place. My father, sister and her family, three brothers, and I went to the market place, which was surrounded by police. The Nazis took away 500 people to the forest, including my father, where they were all shot and killed. 1,500 other people, including my mother and sister, were taken to a railroad station where they were gassed and burned. The last 600 people, including my three brothers and me, were selected to be locked up in ghettos where there were 15-20 people per room," explained Mr. Berger.

Two of his brothers, Michael and Moses, were taken to concentration camps. Michael survived and lived until 1994 when he passed away, and Moses was murdered in the concentration camp. He and his third brother Josh were the only ones left in their family still in the ghettos. They made a plan so that they could finally escape, but they knew that their identity would have to change. Sol had to get a new name and bought false Christian papers so that they could flee into the forest. On December 1, 1942 he and his brother escaped from the ghetto.

"We hid overnight in a Christian Polish place. The next day the Nazis took away my brother, and I never saw him again. Alone I escaped to the forest and I joined a Christian Pole for 14 months. No one knew that I was a Jew, and in April 1944 the Russians adopted me into the army. At this time I had a different name as my first two and in 1945 I met my current wife in Poland. We decided to escape from Poland together with new false papers. We were married two weeks later in Romania, Italy. Unfortunately we were put in a displaced persons camp. A little after I had my first baby, born in Italy in 1946 (He is now a doctor and a professor at USC). In 1948, we all moved to London, England, unable to go to the United States. We lived in England for two years. I knew we needed a passport to cross overseas so I returned to my original name of Salmon Berger. We arrived in L.A., May 17, 1950 and established a new life and new businesses," said Mr. Berger.

"At the age of 57, I decided to sign up for community college to finish my years of education. This helped me later on become a real-estate broker. During college I started a liquor store which was later on destroyed by a riot. But that didn't stop me. I kept on trying and started a department store that was later also burned down in another riot," Mr. Berger described.

Sol has spoken now for 15 years and explains it is still not easy to tell his story in public. He described how the pain never leaves and the nightmares never stop. He now says that he feels very privileged to live in the United States. The message he has to children is to keep learning and without education we have nothing because education is the key to life and success.

William Harvey

By Kaila Fonteno and LaQoia Thompson

William Harvey: A Man Who Has Seen It All

A man named William Harvey, born in The Czech Republic said, ‘’When you smile, the world smiles back at you.’’ He is a survivor of the Holocaust. William Harvey is now 85 years old and has two daughters and four grandsons. His wife was a native Californian, and died of cancer 14 years ago. He also said “When you cry you cry alone.”

William comes from a family of six, four sisters and one brother. William is the youngest member of his family; he is ten years younger than his closest sibling. “My father had just come back from World War I.” His father had gotten hurt severely. When he came back his mother was forced to support the family by sewing their clothes; she had worked extremely hard to make sure that her six children had a good education.

In 1930 Slovakia united and became Czechoslovakia. It was not easy growing up in the atmosphere of Anti-Semitism there at that time. He had a very difficult time trying to comprehend why a Jewish person (anywhere in the world) was not considered being a full person or “human being.” Mr. Harvey listened to Hitler give his speech to the world about how he was going to kill every Jew on the face of the earth or going to make every Jew he didn’t kill live horribly by losing family members.

When William was a young child he made a decision to join the army. A few weeks later after Hitler gave his speech, Hungarian and German soldiers came to Williams’s house. They told him that his mother and his brother had five minutes to grab their valuables and only those that they would be able to carry. They were forced to live in a ghetto; life in that ghetto was unbearable.

Three weeks later, they were forced to travel in cattle cars that were so small they could barely move around in them at all. They had traveled for three days without food or water; the conditions were unsanitary. The children and elderly people were sick with fevers; many people did not survive these inhumane traveling conditions. An old family friend arrived at the camp; at first he didn’t believe it. He was starting to get jealous that the people who arrived at the camp were with their families. The old family friend told him, “Do not be jealous because the people on my side are going to be gassed.” Soon after, that man and 35,000 others were killed in the gas chambers over a three day period while he was locked in his barracks.

They were numbered with tattoos and counted every day. Before William was numbered he was picked to work, and put into another cattle car to go to a different camp. All that they were given to eat there was soup, but had to share it with seven or eight other people. If they were lucky, they received a piece of bread. William and six hundred other people were housed in barns, while working in a refinery. He was eventually returned to the concentration camp.

He was put into another line to get numbered, but they had run out of ink. He was then put into another cattle car, in which he almost froze to death like many others did. The officers thought he was dead so they put him on top of the dead bodies and to the crematory. One of the prisoners realized that he wasn't dead, but close. He removed him from the stack of bodies and put him into a concentration camp infirmary where he rested and recovered. One image he said he'll never forget is of a group of people who arrived at the infirmary after riding in a cattle car without food or water… these people didn't look normal. They had bitten pieces of flesh off of each other's bodies to survive.

He was liberated by the Americans in 1945. He weighted 62 pounds at the age of 20. His mother, aunt, cousins and their children were killed at one of the camps. Only his two sisters survived the concentration camps. "For all of these years I have lived with the painful memories of the Holocaust. It has taken me a long time to learn how to go on with my life and to be happy."

A quote that resonates with us from Reverend Martin Niemoller, a Protestant Minister from Germany and concentration camp survivor is, "In Germany, they first came for the communists. I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews; I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionist, I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me –and no one was left to speak up." Every one should speak up for those who are not like them. In the long run you will need them unless you like fending for yourself. So stand up, speak up for those who are not like you. We were honored to speak with and meet Mr. Harvey. His speaking up about his experiences should ensure that this type of atrocity never happens again.

Morris Price

By Kimberly Espinal and Wayne Almendarez

A Very Brave Survivor

Morris Price was born April 1st, 1927 in a country known as Poland. As a child, Morris was treated better than his brothers and sisters because he was the youngest. He had two brothers and three sisters.

At the age of 12, his homeland Poland was occupied and three years later, he was separated from his family other than his two brothers who were sent to labor camp with him. Two of his three sisters went into hiding in Krakow, Morris' hometown. His oldest sister, his mother and his grandmother and father were sent away to a different camp and he has never seen them since.

As life started to change for Morris, he noticed the cruelty of these people known as Nazis. On some occasions, if the Nazis felt like it, they would kill people for random reasons. For example, they would kill people just because they were not standing in line. Around that time, Morris went into hiding with two of his sisters for one week because he had escaped a ghetto he was placed in to find them and do an old neighbor a favor. In that period of a week, Nazis had a final liquidation of Jews, meaning to make sure there were no more Jews left in his town.

In December of 1942, Morris went back to the ghetto, a place where Nazis made Jewish people live in, and did what he had to do to stay alive. To know how to identify someone, Nazis would give Jewish people tattoos of a number. Morris was number 108262, which meant there were thousands of more people other than him in that one ghetto.

In that same year, Morris escaped and met a person that knew where his sisters were and he went with him. At night time the guy would lead him to his sisters were. Morris found his sisters and later went back to the ghetto. Morris noticed that some people were gone but he did not know they were killed. Then Morris caught a fever that made him very weak. Morris knew that if he became too weak, they would kill him.

In October 1944, Nazis walked him over to another camp. Throughout the walk, American soldiers came and he went with them. At the age of 18, Morris was liberated with one of his brothers, the other passed away, and his two sisters.

Morris, his brother, and both of his sisters went to the United States but had to get jobs to continue surviving. Morris became a watch repair person back in Europe before he left. All of his brothers and sisters got married and he was the last to be wed. Then, in 1950, the Korean War came and he joined the army for three years to fight for the United States, his new home. Ten years later, in 1960, Morris got married and had three children. Just like Morris, his youngest son was treated better, not because he was the youngest but because he had a disability

but that didn't stop him from achieving high goals. Morris' son went to UC Riverside and did better than the students without disabilities, before he passed at a young age.

We appreciate that he had the time to teach us a great deal more about what a person who actually went through the time of the Holocaust's point of view is in such depth. We learned a lot about the Holocaust, not only from the world famous Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. that we visited in January around the time of the inauguration of President Barack Obama, but also from a very brave man, Mr. Morris Price. We are forever thankful for his time.

Assemblymember Bob Blumenfield

District 40

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

George Brown *Interviewed by Kathleen Poirier*

George Brown

By Kathleen Poirier

George Brown's Incredible Journey

I am fortunate to have interviewed an extraordinary man named George Brown. Not only did George survive the Holocaust, he went on to live a full and meaningful life. Here is his story.

George was born in Hungary in 1929. He grew up in Mateszalka, Hungary. He was the youngest of four children. George lived with his mother, father, two brothers, and one sister. Although he grew up poor they were always taken care of. George's mother was very religious and attended Shabbat services every Friday night. George and his siblings weren't very religious although all of them were Bar Mitzvahed. Their neighborhood was primarily Christian, so Jewish culture wasn't able to thrive.

George was living a fine life with his family until the anti-Semitism started in 1939. At first Jewish people didn't really feel victimized. Racial slurs were heard often but nothing too drastic. Then the first anti-Semitic law surfaced in 1939. Then things got progressively worse and four years later George's family was forced from their home with very few belongings and put into a ghetto. Ghettos were small isolated communities where Jewish people were placed so they wouldn't taint the rest of the population. George and his family stayed together in the ghetto and lived there for six weeks in horrible conditions. Then the ghetto was emptied and George and his family were pushed into a cattle wagon and sent directly to Auschwitz.

Auschwitz was one of the largest extermination camps in Poland. Auschwitz had two options for those held captive there--work or die. If you were unable to work, you would be killed. After a long ride in a railroad car with no food or fresh air, George and his family arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau on June 2, 1944. Due to these terrible conditions, most people arriving were sick and weak. George, his father and brothers were immediately separated from his mother and sister. This would be the last time George would ever see his mother. George, his father and brothers were put in a line to start the selection process. People were judged by looks and physical strength to determine if the person was able to work. If the person was deemed too weak or sick- looking, that person was killed. Fortunately, all four of them survived selection. It turned out that George's mother was unable to work, therefore was the first in the family to be killed at the hands of the Nazis. Only two hours after arriving at Auschwitz his mother had already been gassed and cremated.

George told me that the only reason he survived was because of his father. His father was an amazing man who always put his children first. His father risked being killed to insure his children would be able to flee. His father found a Gypsy willing to help him and his children escape. On the night of June 6, George and his family were taken with 50 other people. George and the others were immediately put in railroad cars and sent to a labor camp. This camp was heaven compared to Auschwitz. They were actually fed and nobody was killed at the labor camp. It turned out that most of the people at this labor camp were fellow Hungarians.

Then one day everyone at the labor camp was forced to walk to a coal cart in below freezing weather. The prisoners were not dressed for such weather so many people fell to the wayside and were shot or suffered severe frostbite. Of the people who suffered from frostbite were George's two brothers. Once George and his brothers reached the coal cart they were immediately on their way to Austria. They were sent to a larger labor camp called Ebensee, which was near Mauthausen in Austria. Once at Ebensee, they were able to work in return for food. George knew his father was unable to do the work required, and he slowly saw his father's health deteriorate. He was lacking nutrition and medical attention.

One day after George had finished working he returned to his barracks only to find that his father was gone. His father was his main source of hope in all this despair, and he was losing him. George desperately tried to see him in the hospital but he wasn't allowed to visit. During this time, George continued to work. One day while working on the railroad a man told George that his father had passed away. George refused to believe this man and continued to work.

That same day, George was told that the Americans were closing in and all of the prisoners were going to be liberated. George didn't want to get his hopes up so he didn't pay much attention. When George returned to the labor camp after working, he was told by a group of SS soldiers that they would be fighting the next day in a series of tunnels. Later on that night an SS soldier pulled George to the side and told him that they would not be fighting, the tunnels were mined and if he went to go fight he would be killed. George heeded this warning and sure enough the next day, which was May 5, he heard the explosions in the tunnels. George's eyes lit up when we was describing this event to me. He was very grateful to the SS soldier who saved his life. That night, George went to sleep in his barracks with all of the other prisoners who survived.

The next morning they awoke to see not one SS officer in sight. This was quite strange because normally there were always officers around to make sure the prisoners didn't escape. George and all others didn't dare leave for fear the SS would come out of hiding and shoot them all. Everyone thought this was a trick until a tank pulled to the front gate of the Labor camp. From this tank, nine American soldiers emerged. It was 2:00 pm on Sunday afternoon, May 6, 1945. As George was recalling this moment, his eyes began to fill with tears. I could almost see his experiences in the tears running down his face. He went on to explain that the soldiers came into the camp and told everyone they were now free. George said, "those people were not soldiers but angels in American uniforms." George remembered one soldier in particular whose name was Kelmer Moll. These men liberated everyone in both the labor and concentration camps. At last, the nightmare was over.

But what now? George was 16 and alone. Soon after George was liberated, he found out that his entire family had been killed. George was distraught after hearing the news and tried to commit suicide. He couldn't imagine living in a world without family. He went home but found that his house had been taken over by the communists and since the rest of George's family wasn't coming home, he was not able to reclaim his house. It took a while for George to get back on his feet, and eight months later, George went to Germany and stayed there for over a

year. Then he found out that Canada took in orphans under 18 years old so George emigrated to Canada in 1948.

There he ended up meeting his wife in 1950. They got married the following year in 1952 and moved to Buffalo, New York in the hope of a better life. The same year they were blessed with the birth of their first child – a son. In 1956 their second child was born--a daughter. George's life was starting to move forward. George began speaking to local schools about his experiences in concentration camps and urging people to stop hating others because they are different. George said, "hate is what created the Holocaust--if only we were all colorblind. We were all created in the image of God so why must we hate one another?" George believes that America is a wonderful country, in spite of the problems we face. He thinks that if we stick together and work together, American could be truly a great country. George stresses this to the school children he visits.

In 1991 George decided to write a book, entitled "I Survived the Nazi's Hell." He wrote it in six weeks. The book details everything George Brown had to overcome. In 1993 George retired, and a year later he returned to Hungary to speak to school children in his native country.

Today, George lives a happy and fulfilling life in Northridge, California with his wife, and continues to speak about the Holocaust. Next year he plans to return to Hungary for more speaking engagements. George continues to speak because he wants to ensure that this monstrous event, the Holocaust, will never be forgotten, and those who lost their lives did not die in vain.

This interview changed my perspective on the Holocaust. I always knew the severity of it but I had never been face to face with a survivor. The reality of it is shocking--to realize that one crazed man's pursuit of a "perfect race" caused six million innocent people to die. I feel so fortunate to have been able to interview George Brown. His story is gripping and tragic, yet he has chosen to share his story in order to open up people's eyes to the horrors of hate. George Brown is a hero in my eyes. I hope he continues to share his story with people everywhere because hearing the stories first hand is like no other learning experience.

Assemblymember Julia Brownley

District 41

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Henry (Heinz) Oster *Interviewed by Erik Hayden*

Henry (Heinz) Oster

By Erik Hayden

January 1945. Over one thousand of them were herded into open railroad cars like cattle. The boys and men were packed tightly—sweating, tired and shivering. They stared into the cold steel of the elevated machine gun turrets. It began to softly rain and the train lurched forward. Heinz huddled against the wall and gazed above at the gray sky. He heard the hum of the planes and saw them come into view—they weren't German. The Allied planes descended through the layered clouds, leveled, then fired. There was a deafening roar as the planes twice strafed the open cars of the already demoralized men. They killed hundreds of Auschwitz prisoners en route to another camp. They strafed men who were unable to run, unable to move, unable to duck, unable to protest the irony of their own death. Heinz could only slump against a wall and hope.

Heinz Oster, now known as Henry, was born in Cologne, Germany during chaotic, transitional times. It was 1928, the foundations of republicanism were crumbling and the specter of fascism and ascent of Hitler loomed in the near future.

In 1935 the Nuremburg Laws rattled the childhood of young Heinz. Under the new Nazi regime the German Jews were subject to a systematic process of elimination: they were pressured to leave the country or compelled to relinquish basic civil rights and submit themselves to Nazi supervisors. Only the wealthy few were able to escape or obtain necessary documents to leave—the majority of German Jews were forced to comply with the Nazi regime.

Heinz was taken out of the Jewish school that he attended, his father was placed in a forced labor camp, and he was confined to a small, one bedroom apartment shared between his mother and nine other people. These long days of his early youth were spent looking out the windows of his apartment. He was excited at the prospect of skipping school but bored with the monotony of the restricted life. A yellow Jewish star was firmly sewn onto the breast pocket and back of his jacket. Local Jewish grocery stores were similarly labeled. All other Jewish establishments were forced to close or taken over by the Nazis.

Heinz witnessed his neighbors, his family, his friends slowly stripped of their civil rights. Jews were not subject to due process under the law and had no right to read newspapers, own homes or automobiles. They had to abandon gold, silver and other luxury items and could not use public transportation or even wander into certain areas that were not designated. Once or twice a month his Father would come home to rest from his forced labor assignment. A distant uncle obtained an affidavit to immigrate to the United States. Food became scarcer and Nazi supervision became more severe.

On November 9, 1938, Nazi troopers erupted with riots and spiteful violence. Jewish establishments and synagogues were burned and left to ruin. Turmoil reigned in these streets while Jewish families huddled in their homes. In the chaos of these dark reprisals, shards of glass—crushed shop windowpanes—glimmered like crystal in the roaring orange night. "The Night of Crystal" was the launch of Germany's elimination of its Jews and invasion of Poland in

1939 and the subsequent establishment of a multitude of Polish extermination camps to herd the German and Polish Jews.

After surviving the British bombing of the city of Cologne, Germany in 1941 the Osters were forced to leave their overcrowded apartment. The SS troops and their snarling German shepherds broke down the doors of the apartment in the dead of night and forced Heinz and his family onto a truck headed for an assembly area.

At the assembly point Heinz and his parents were herded onto a train bound for Poland. They arrived in the Polish Lodz ghetto bewildered and without any of their possessions. 160,000 Jews were shoved into a little over 20,000 rooms. There they endured the winter with little more than body heat for warmth. Heinz's mother was forced to work in a factory that made iron plates for the soles of the military boots. His father worked to reinforce and repair the ghetto fence. Heinz tended the meager crops in the fields, hoping to steal a few peas or beans during the course of the day in order to dissolve them in his mouth at night. They were all overworked and undernourished.

On Sundays the inhabitants of the Ghetto were coerced into attending the sadistic "Sunday's Entertainment." Those Jews unfortunate enough to have gotten caught stealing food or otherwise commit a real or imaginary violation were publicly hanged. Heinz and his friends watched the hangings with detached empathy—they wondered if they would be selected next.

On a particularly cruel day, six months after arriving, Heinz's father was mistaken for escaping past the ghetto's fence. An ambitious guard shot him as he worked. His body was dumped in a hastily dug grave. There was little time for remembrance or ceremony during that day. At night in the crowded, freezing room, shared with 19 other people, Heinz, his mother and the others would hold their own impromptu service.

Outside Heinz's darkened room he could hear Nazi foot soldiers and SS troopers cordoning off sections of the neighborhood, raiding the ghetto's apartment buildings and sending their inhabitants by truck to unknown destinations. Heinz and his mother had managed to avoid two of these raids by sneaking up to an attic above their room and lying flat against the darkened ceiling beams. S.S. troopers who opened up the attic door stared into a still, deathly silent chamber.

In the spring of 1943, Heinz and his mother were seized in a ghetto raid and herded to a train once more. Again, Heinz was unaware of his destination and strained to see out of the boxcar to search for any discernable clues. After several days of travel the train came to steady halt and sat idle. Heinz could only see yellowish fields and strung wires. The train, waiting for darkness, lurched alive again before coming to an abrupt halt. The doors were ripped open and the train's inhabitants were violently unloaded onto a large platform.

Uniformed S.S. ripped apart male and female prisoners and in an instant Heinz's mother disappeared. There were no parting words, no final hug, only a final glance at the German officer with a swagger stick who separated the men and women into different columns. All he

could do was dazedly march towards temporary barracks buildings where he was forced to strip his clothes, kneel and had his hair forcefully shaved by Nazi technicians.

He continued moving. He entered an archway and was doused with a liquid that burned his abused scalp. The shower's water was strong and cold and lasted only a few seconds. They were rushed to the exit. They always were rushed—it left no time for prisoners to think. At the exit was a huge clearing surrounded by a fence next to a building with an enormous smokestack. A crematorium. The air was thick. He saw a group of people dressed in blue and white uniforms.

Bundles of miserably worn shoes, clothes, hats and jackets were tossed to the bewildered, shivering, shaved and stripped new prisoners. Heinz stood naked next to a pile of dirty clothes. He tenderly began to sort the clothes and exchanged for his approximate size. The men in the blue and white uniforms, inmate guards, gave them a cursory nod then flatly stated, "Welcome to Auschwitz."

Heinz was not in Auschwitz itself, but rather in the extermination complex of Birkenau, a mile away from the actual camp. His mother and non-selected arrivals entered a similar looking barrack. It was one of the gas chambers where the new arrivals perished the same day. He languished in these temporary barracks. He wasn't unhealthy enough to be taken in the selections to the crematorium. So he waited. He tried to get by on just a slice of bread and a bowl of watery soup. He existed. Barely. He watched others shrivel and die around him. He was a starving fifteen-year-old boy with no education, no family, and no experience other than mistreatment. He had only his misguided feelings of hope, which were just as useless as all the rest.

B7648. What this number stood for he had no idea, only that it meant he was to leave the camp. Before getting the number excruciatingly tattooed in his forearm, Heinz had volunteered to be taken out of the camp for "a purpose." Along with 130 other boys he was selected to leave the barracks in the trucks outside. He was driven to the actual Auschwitz camp.

His, and the other's, job was to clean, care for and maintain the horse stalls—and facilitate the reproductive process of the animals. He herded the stallion to the mare's stalls often and was kicked and whipped by the spirited horses. They were annoyed by his presence. He spent hours, sixteen a day, in the stables. He combed, brushed, fed and cleaned the horses and stalls. The most beautiful was a fiery red stallion named Barbarossa, after the legend of the German warrior with a ferocious red beard. When it reared it looked like a Greek god's statue. It fiercely kicked back at its caretaker, young Heinz. His face was perpetually scratched and cut by lacerations from the horse's tail. Still he managed to avoid the death selections and was given the job as an administrative runner in the camp.

The job of a runner was to stay invisible while quickly delivering the daily head count. He developed a consistent route to the drab administrative buildings, a route that happened to pass by the camp's bakery. The smell of warm bread wafted to his nose and his mouth watered as he ran past the building. A prisoner who worked at the bakery perpetually tried to drop a loaf of bread but Heinz was wary of a potential trap. One day hunger got the best of him and he

lunged at the loaf of bread, felt its coarse texture in his hands, and ran straight into the chest of the German officer in charge of the bakery.

He was caught and whipped. Heinz cried out in German under the merciless beating and the officer steadied the whip. He barked at him and asked why he spoke German. Heinz caught his breath and whispered that he was born in Germany. The officer wanted to know where. Cologne, Heinz whispered. The officer hesitated, then pulled the whip back to strike, then struck hard at his own boot. The officer stood. "I am from Cologne myself." He grabbed Heinz, screamed at him for taking the bread and threw him onto the cold concrete below the building. He heard thuds of two objects landing next to him as he slowly picked himself off the ground. The loaf of bread and a tomato lay next to him.

In January of 1945 Heinz Oster was assigned to a two day death march toward a central train station outside Auschwitz. German shepherds followed the prisoners through the snow and weaponized vehicles prodded the boys and men to ever-faster speeds. The sides of the streets were littered with snow banks and twisted, cold corpses. Heinz tried to stay comfortably in the middle, surrounded by the body heat and protection of the pack of men. Those who fell too far behind the pack were mercilessly shot and left. They continued this death march for miles. Luckily, Heinz was young enough and strong enough to survive the march.

A thousand men wearily boarded the open-air boxcars of the aging train under the watchful eyes of the machine gunners. The entryways were locked and the train lurched forward. It began to softly mist from the gray sky overhead. He was trying to rest when he heard the hum of the planes. The strafing began.

Heinz Oster stepped off the battered and strafed train as one of three hundred and eighty men who didn't die from the selections, the death march, suffocation, strafing or freezing. He had arrived back on German soil in Buchenwald, a concentration camp that did not actively execute its prisoners—they still starved or died of sickness. Among its prisoners were political exiles and notable German Nationals of worth. Heinz languished in the camp. The deep thumps of distant bombs and the meager encouragement from his companions kept him company and alive.

Early April 1945 the mountain camp was eerily quiet. Food supply had been depleted and many Nazi guards had abandoned their posts. A few remained. Heinz slept and weakly sat in the barracks, others did the same. He barely had the strength to move. He heard wails from a comrade who was obviously hallucinating—he saw a tank on the horizon garnished with the Star of David. Heinz laughed at this feebly until he heard a repeating Yiddish phrase yelled over a loudspeaker. You are free. You are free.

The tank had crashed through the defensive emplacements of the camp followed behind by scores of African-American troopers. It was U.S. General Patton's Third Armored Division who broke through the lines. All remaining Nazi SS and guards had abandoned the camp. Red Cross volunteers bringing food and medical resources were on their way. Heinz Oster, who had spent his formative years in a Polish Ghetto, Birkenau, an Auschwitz stable and Buchenwald concentration camp, was finally freed. He vowed to never step foot on German soil again and to

this day has not. He is one of only18 German-born children found after the war in all the concentration camps.

He was the beneficiary of good timing, blind hope and a little confidence, maybe defiance. That's all he can attribute it to. He let the Nazis break his body but refused to surrender his mind. He had to preserve it. He had a future.

Exactly a year later Heinz Oster was living in the U.S. His distant uncle who had escaped the atrocities of the Holocaust had seen his name in a Los Angeles newspaper listed as a survivor and contacted the American consulate. Heinz was one of the first Holocaust survivors to leave Europe after the war ended. He embarked on a small ship with tears of joy—grateful, passionate and forward thinking. He has lived in the United States since 1946.

Assemblymember Joan Buchanan
District 15

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Werner Loeb *Interviewed by Jonathan Black*

Acknowledgements

Dr. Anne Grenn Saldinger
Holocaust Center of Northern California

Werner Loeb

By Jonathan Black

Werner's Story

On the drive over to Mr. Werner Loeb's residence, I realized that I was anxious. Not because I was running ten minutes late due to my directional challenges, but rather because I felt an overwhelming sensation, like a tidal wave of history and specific detail awaited me across the threshold of his front door. When I walked into Werner's house my brain was buzzing with numerous questions. The anticipation and awe I felt about the opportunity hear from a voice of Jewish history that endured Germany's Nazis regime must have been palpable to Werner.

Every story has a beginning, middle and an end. After vaulting into the middle and end of the story, it became evident that, to truly appreciate Werner's story you must start at the beginning.

Werner was one of two brothers. His older brother was born in 1923 and Werner was born in 1925. Shortly after, Werner's family moved to Steinheim, a small town in Germany with a population of about 4,000 people. Werner recalls the presence of a "relatively large" Jewish community in Steinheim that consisted of about 100 Jewish people.

Werner began to recognize the discriminatory treatment of Jews in 1937, when he was forced to go to Jewish boarding school because Jewish children were no longer permitted to attend German public schools. Werner was not able to see his parents again until 1938 because Jews were not allowed to use the train unless they were given "special permission."

Events took a turn for the worst on Kristallnacht, or "Crystal Night," November 9, 1938. The SS destroyed many Jewish synagogues, books, businesses, and rounded up many of the men and sent them to concentration camps. Werner remembers that day clearly because he watched all the books and Torah scrolls being burned at his school. Then he and all the other boys were put on a train and taken to Buchenwald, a concentration camp. Fortunately, the camp commander refused to admit the boys, so Werner and the other students were sent home because the SS had destroyed their boarding school.

When Werner returned home, his mother informed him that his father had been taken to a concentration camp. Imagine, for a second, that you are 13 years old - you have seen the books in your school destroyed, the very books that a day before set the parameter for your intellectual growth. You have been pushed on to the train to go to a concentration camp, which by some sparkle of chance, rejected boys from admittance and sent you home. When you finally get to see your family after a yearlong absence, which at thirteen seems like the better part on an eternity, you find out that your father was sent to a concentration camp. Werner's father was released a month later on the contingency that he would leave the country. Werner's family found a family sponsor in the United States, but the number they drew was too high to have any value in the United States immigration quota system. Werner had investigated immigrating to Israel, but his desire to remain with his family prevented Werner from leaving without them.

Werner explained to me his father's perception at the time. He had served in the German Army in WWI and received an Iron Cross, the highest award bestowed upon a German solider, in recognition for his dedication and sacrifice as a German soldier. After the war, he became a dairy cattle dealer and built a reputable life in Germany. Werner's father had always been a patriot, although he was Jewish, he was a German. Werner's father never could have imagined that the country he loved so much would turn on him. As we sat at the wooden kitchen table, I could see Werner endeavor to place himself inside his father's thoughts to understand how he could have been so blind to the coming tragedy.

For part of 1939, Werner lived at home with his family. He illustrated a picture of what life was like during this time, in which the threat of being Jewish encircled Werner's every thought and action. Rocks were thrown through windows of Jewish houses, Jews weren't allowed to own a bike, much less an automobile, radios were off limits for Jews to own, and grocery shopping was for one hour a week at a designated location and time. Jews lived in a controlled existence - they were told when, where, and what to do, but never given the common decency of why there were these limitations, other than because they were Jews.

Werner credits the next turn of events with keeping him alive. He was sent to a Jewish apprentice shop in Hamburg to become a machinist. The set of skills Werner learned at this apprentice shop became invaluable. During this time, Werner lived in a boarding house about a mile and a half away, a distance he walked every day. The boarding house also had Jewish girls that were sewing apprentices, a skill set that helped save the lives of many Jewish girls. Werner continued to work there until 1941, when they closed the shop and Werner was forced to return home.

In 1941, Werner's brother contracted meningitis. At this time, Jew or non-Jew, the German mentality was that people who were mentally or physically impaired were not worthy to live. Although Werner does not know what really happened to his brother, he believes that he was a victim of euthanasia in a German hospital. Werner knows that his parents received a vague letter informing them that his brother had died.

In July of 1942, Werner's family was told, "Pack what you can carry and make some sandwiches, if you can." Werner showed me some pictures a German soldier had given to him after the war. One of the pictures was of the bus and the bus driver with his knee high socks on top of the bus strapping on baggage of "whatever they could carry." Werner looked at the picture for a moment and said we never saw that baggage ever again. Werner and his family were sent to Theresienstadt (or Terezin) concentration camp. Werner recalls that there were many Jewish families at this camp and about 70,000 Jews at one time.

In 1943, Werner's father died of starvation. Werner was then sent to a work camp where he had to build a mound of dirt for a shooting range by hand. Werner was then sent to a labor camp on the outskirts of Berlin. Here, 250 Jewish craftsmen were ordered to construct a secret government facility.

At this point in the interview, Werner's wife, Lilo, who is also a survivor, came home. Lilo was born to a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father. Werner left me at the kitchen table with this remarkable woman to print out some documents he wanted me to reference after I had left. Lilo recalls that her mother had died before all of the tragic events of the Holocaust, which seemed to bring about a sense of relief that her mother did not have to endure them.

Lilo described how she was a seamstress and how she had developed a way to detach the mandatory star she had to wear as a Jew. Lilo was forced to work as a seamstress outside the camp making uniforms for SS personnel. As Werner returned to the kitchen, he said he used to wear his star under the lapel on his coat. Although Werner's way was clever, Lilo's technique seemed to be more advanced. They both described how it would be an awful idea to be caught without the star. They both said that it was a life and death risk, thus they responded in clever ways that bent the rule but did not break it.

Werner returned to his seat at the kitchen table with some informational the papers. He handed them to me with the instructions to read the papers after I left. "Werner, as a machinist building a secret government facility in Berlin for the top SS officials, did you get any extra food or privileges?" I asked. Werner responded, "No, we got soup and bread." I responded, "Like goulash?" Werner smiled, "Like water and cabbage." Lilo interjected a trade secret: "Sometimes, if you scoop down deep enough you could get pieces of potato too." I was amazed, watching the interaction about the soup and other details about their experiences. They pieced together the puzzle of their first meeting at the camp bakery in which Lilo worked, right around the time of the liberation. They had two parallel stories and were married in San Francisco in 1950.

Both Lilo and Werner give meaning to words like perseverance, courage, and determination. They survived one of the most tragic events in human history. They never knew the state of the war, they never knew if help was on the way, but they never gave up. They had no concept of how long their persecution would last, how much torture and humiliation they would have to endure, and yet every day they found a way to survive. Werner says, "There are many stories like ours… There may not be enough paper and pens to write all of them." Werner and Lilo's memories of their early life experiences are a crucial part of the human experience and history, which serves as a warning and reminder to the rest of us. Werner cautions that a human life should never been seen as a number, causality, or a loss. Every human life has a name, a past, and a future and until we recognize human value, the world has failed to learn from experiences like the ones had by Werner and Lilo.

Assemblymember Wesley Chesbro

District 1

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

Samuel Oliner *Interviewed by Haley Katz*

Samuel Oliner

By Haley Katz

My Interview with Samuel Oliner: Holocaust Survivor

On Monday, March 16th, I interviewed Sam Oliner at his house in Arcata, California. He is a retired professor of Sociology who taught at Humboldt State University for many years. He has written several books, both by himself and with his wife, Pearl Oliner.

Sam was born Shmulek Oliner in Zyndranowa, Poland in 1930. Zyndranowa was a farming village near the Czechoslovakian border with approximately 30 Jewish people before the war. He had one younger brother and one older sister named Feigele. His father owned a small general store and was also a farmer. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was only seven years old. His father remarried a woman named Esther. He and Esther later had two other children together, a boy and a girl. Before the war, the Oliner family lived a quiet life.

All that changed on September 1st, 1939. On that historic day, Germany attacked Poland, triggering the beginning of World War II in Europe. Germany quickly captured Poland, and life began to change drastically for the Jewish people in captured territories. Little by little, the rights of Polish Jews were being taken away. For example, if you were age twelve or over, you had to wear a Star of David to identify you as a Jew. The penalty for not wearing your Star of David and getting caught by the Gestapo could be death. Also, if you were Jewish, you weren't allowed to go in certain stores. Jewish children were not allowed to go to school with Gentile children. Sam wasn't able to read at the beginning of the war because of this, but Sam spoke both Yiddish and Polish.

At first, the Jews were able to stay in their own homes. But as time went on, Jews were quickly moved in to isolated communities called "ghettos." The ghettos were areas of towns that were fenced off and isolated from the rest of the non-Jewish community. The Germans forced Jewish families out of their homes and said they could only take what they could carry. Food was at a premium and many people starved or died of diseases in the ghettos. When Sam's family was sent to the ghetto, Sam would be able to sneak out of the ghetto through a hole in the fence. No one outside of the ghetto knew Sam was Jewish because with his blonde hair and blue eyes, he looked like a Gentile boy. Sam traded such things as pens, pencils and razor blades outside the ghetto for food, which he smuggled back inside the ghetto to feed his family.

Sam recalls one instance in his book where his sister, Feigele, who was seventeen years old at the time, was asked to report to Gestapo headquarters. When they arrived at Gestapo headquarters, the officer who told them to come there said he didn't recall asking her to come. After that, the Germans told Sam to go home. Feigele was brutalized by the four or five German officers. When she arrived home, she was somber and tried to hide her emotions from her family.

On August 12th, 1942, mobile killing units called "Einsatzgruppen," composed of German and Ukrainian soldiers, surrounded the ghetto, forcing the Jews into military vehicles. Esther suspected something terrible was going to happen to them. In the panic, Esther told Sam,

“run my child. Run away so that you will save yourself.” Sam hid in the attic until all the soldiers were done rounding up all of the Jews. Then he could escape through the hole in the fence.

Sam quickly learned the Nazis had trucked the Jews from the ghetto to a spot in the forest about nine miles away. There was a huge trench dug in the ground waiting for them. The Nazis lined up the Jews next to the trench and the soldiers turned their machine guns on them. The trench became a mass grave.

After all of the Nazi soldiers were out of sight, Sam left the attic and escaped through the hole in the fence. Not knowing where to go, he ran to the house of his parents’ friends. The woman who owned the house was named Balwina. She was a devout Catholic. She took him into her home and hid him. She said that Sam would have to know all of the Catholic prayers, including the catechism. She changed his name to that befitting a Polish boy, Jusek Polewski, and told him to go find work. Sam was only twelve years old. Sam found work tending farm animals with a childless couple, the Padworskis, who did not know Sam was Jewish. On many occasions, through quick thinking, Sam managed to hide his true identity from the Padworskis.

Sam survived many narrow escapes from having his identity discovered. One night, toward the end of the German occupation of Poland, a boy about his age accused Sam of being Jewish. This was in a German work camp, where Sam and other laborers were “drafted” to dig ditches to slow the advance of the approaching Russian tank corps. Sam defended himself by going on the offensive against the boy, throwing the accusations back at him. A German guard discovered them fighting. But because the barracks were so dark he couldn’t make the physical check that would have identified Sam as a Jewish boy right then. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by constant airplane bombing by the Russians, Sam escaped the work camp before the guard could check him.

Finally, the Russians drove the Germans out of Poland in late 1944. The Russians then ordered Sam to deliver weapons on a horse-drawn wagon to the front. Fearing for his safety and not wanting to transport weapons, Sam escaped from the Russians and made his way back to the Padworskis’ house.

After the war ended in 1945, Sam found that nearly his entire family and relatives had perished in the Holocaust.

After gaining title to land owned by his family and relatives before the war, Sam turned it over to Balwina, the woman who had sheltered him; helped him survive the Holocaust. Then Sam decided to leave Poland. He traveled with some friends to the American Zone in Germany, in Munich, where he ended up in a displaced persons camp. The British government decided to take in young, orphaned Jews. He learned to read and speak English while living in England. With help from the Jewish benevolent organizations, Sam found a distant relative living in New York who ultimately became his sponsor and brought him to the United States. Sam was drafted to serve in the army during the Korean War. During his service, he was made an official U.S. citizen.

After being honorably discharged, he returned to New York City and took advantage of the G.I. Bill to go to college. He earned his Bachelor's Degree from Brooklyn College, where he met his future wife, Pearl. He moved to California and ultimately received his PhD from U.C. Berkeley. He landed a teaching position at Humboldt State University in the early 1970s and remained at the university until his retirement.

Sam's book, Restless Memories, brings more details to his story. I admire Sam for not only having the courage to talk about his tragic youth, but to subsequently write books and speak to young people about those experiences. As the saying goes, by forgetting the past, you are destined to repeat it.

Assemblymember Joe Coto
District 23

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Adam Cintz

Interviewed by Kyle Tabuena-Frolli and Elaine Tran

Acknowledgements

Jewish Federation of Silicon Valley

Adam Cintz

By Kyle Tabuena-Frolli and Elaine Tran

The Shape of Resilience

"Why don't you come in?" he said, with a warm smile and twinkling eyes. Mr. Adam Cintz had a story to tell. 1916 found a 6 year-old Cintz in Warsaw, living a hard life. His father had died of typhus in 1906, and this loss, coupled with the start of World War I, compounded the family misery. There was not enough to eat, so Cintz and his siblings had to work, committing themselves to an underwear factory, and various odd jobs like rolling cigarettes. "But we were comfortable," he claims. "We had bread."

Strife and optimism helped Cintz find happiness in his meager surroundings. By 1936, he had joined his uncle in managing their underwear factory, and was supporting a wife and son. The absurd provocations of a senseless war refused to allow him more than a few years of security. One morning, in 1939, Cintz looked out his window to see the Gestapo patrolling the streets. "Today, we walk here," they would announce, puffing out megalomaniac chests. "Tomorrow, we rule the whole world."

In 1939, Cintz and his family were gathered around a small stove that, despite its apparent strain, remained a hopelessly insufficient heater. They were all living in the cramped room that they shared with several other unfortunate people. The Gestapo had rounded up all the Jews in the area, and was shoving them into destitute ghettoes. The ghettos were surrounded by barbwire and anyone who went near the fence was shot.

Each new day was stained with unthinkable, unbearable horrors. Starvation, despair, and suicide claimed multitudes. "They were sending food not to feed the people," explained Cintz, "but to starve them. And we were starving, but," confides Cintz, a definite twinkle illuminating in his pained eyes, "I was very handy, you see."

Cintz and a few others were making uniforms for the Germans in exchange for the extra food that kept his family alive. Circumstances worsened. Everyday, Cintz and his family feared "transport," the word that sent Jews to concentration camps – a death sentence from which no one ever returned. And one day, the dreaded word came. Cintz and his family were being transferred to Auschwitz.

After two days of standing in filth, locked in a dark, packed boxcar, Cintz and his family arrived at the death camp. Upon stepping down from the compartment, they were immediately separated. Cintz's wife received a violent blow to her head for clutching too desperately to her children. Later, when Cintz tried to extract information from a coppo (a Jewish elder who worked on the grounds) about the whereabouts of his children, he was given a jeering reply. "You see over there, that bonfire over there? They are burning."

After Auschwitz, after the months of a meager diet of watery soup and bread, frigid temperatures, disease, and a perpetual dread of merciless beatings and gas chambers, Adam

Cintz and the few hundred that were left were made to march to another camp. From there, the Germans continued to herd Cintz and his emaciated, but tenacious group from camp to camp.

Until the morning when Cintz spotted the approaching American tanks, followed by defeated German soldiers with their arms raised above their heads in surrender. “The Americans tried to hand me a .45,” Cintz remembers with a chuckle, “but I just wanted to go home to meet my family.” And he did. After returning to what was left of his house in Poland, Cintz hid in the bathroom of a train headed to Czechoslovakia to find his wife. From the refugee camp there, the resilient couple immigrated to America, where Cintz, true to his positive, unwavering spirit, found work, supported his growing family, and continued to survive.

Assemblymember Mike Eng

District 49

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Maurice Rosenfeld

In his own words

Maurice Rosenfeld

My name is Maurice Rosenfeld. I was born in Krakow, Poland in 1923. I am a Holocaust survivor.

We were a quite large, close-knit family. My father had three sisters: Adele, Leah and Rosa. My mother had two brothers... one who emigrated to the United States in 1900. The other brother passed away as a relatively young man... leaving behind his wife Sarah and their twelve children behind. Sarah made a living for her family as a seamstress of sheets and pillow cases for newlywed couples.

The tragedy of the Holocaust started in 1939 when the Germans surrounded areas of Poland and took the young men away to unspecified locations. They simply disappeared.

My family owned and operated a candy store on Stradom Street, across the street from the King's Palace. My parents rented the store space in a building that was owned by the Catholic Church. My mother was a tenant there before she was married. She had rented it, as a young woman, because her brother had passed away and she wanted to care for her family and. mother.

One day the Germans came to our area and surrounded the town. At the time we were living on a street near a Jewish Theatre. The German soldiers went from house to house, taking silver, jewelry... basically everything of value.

My cousin was living next door to us. The Germans started yelling to him and everyone else to get out of the building. Then one German yelled for them to go faster... so they all started to run... and then the soldiers started shooting and they shot my cousin in the back and killed him. His brother survived, however, but was killed later on in the war.

It is difficult for me, after 60 years, to remember all the names and events that happened during all those horrific times. So please forgive if my thoughts are disjointed or if my words and sentences run on a bit too long.

As a sixteen year old boy, I was thrown in to a “snake pit” with strangers. My parents and all of our family had to move from Krakow to Wieliczka, where we lived for one year. Then the Germans came again and deported all of the Jews. The women were taken separately. My sister didn’t have to go with my Mother but she didn’t want to be separated from her and so she went with her. That was the last time I saw either one of them. They were taken to a transport and never returned.

My brother and I were together in a concentration camp in Plaszow and my father was moved to Prokocim, another camp. My father developed a severe kidney condition and was taken to a hospital in the Krakow ghetto. The last time I saw him there he was sitting at the edge of his bed and praying for me. He died when the Germans liquidated the ghetto... slaughtering thousands of people by shooting them like dogs in the streets and their apartments.

My little cousin of six, the daughter of my father's sister Rose, was beckoned over by a German soldier. When she got close to him he pulled out a gun and shot her in the neck. She collapsed and started bleeding from the wound. The soldier figured that she was dead and he moved on. On the following day, a crew from a concentration was ordered in to clean out the ghetto from all of the victim's belongings and bring them back to their camp. My cousin was found by one of them, a young neighbor boy named Wolf, who recognized her and discovered that she was still alive. He wrapped her up, put her between some of the gathered belongings and brought her back to her mother in the Plaszow ghetto. Miraculously her mother was able to nurse her back to life. The little girl stayed hidden there with her mother for almost a year... but then someone reported that there was a child living on that block and the Germans came and shot the little girl again.

My aunt Rose had three children when the war broke out... two daughters and a son. The oldest daughter, Golda, went off on a transport with her youngest son. Rose lost all three children but survived the war. When the war ended, someone told her that her husband was alive in a concentration camp in another town. She hitch-hiked to that town but discovered that he had died before she arrived.

My Aunt Sarah, a relative from my Mother's side of the family, lived close to us in the ghetto. She was an angel. She was always asking me if she could do me a favor... wash my clothes, anything. When the German's came to liquidate the ghetto, she was thrown into a wheelbarrow and then shot in the back of the head.

This was brutality beyond description... beyond belief. German soldiers were shooting young mothers who were holding babies and young children in their arms. Sometimes they shot the mother first and other times the babies first. You have to ask yourself where was the world when this was happening? What did all of the righteous do knowing this was going on?

And where could we turn... who could we ask for help? Those we encountered simply turned away or said that what was happening didn't concern them. And even that includes the United States. When a ship of refugees came to the U.S., President Roosevelt had it turned away. Soon later the ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat and 400 people perished... including my cousin, his wife, and two daughters.

I am telling you in brief the story of my family. I will now continue telling my story from the time I was in the concentration camp working for Schindler… not directly for him but as a prisoner, a slave laborer assigned to one of the three factories that he ran in his camp. I was working in the production of aircraft radiator repair. Each radiator was assigned a certain number of hours for it to be repaired... and we all had a quota that we had to keep. I found a method for making my repairs go much faster which allowed me to share some of my time with others so that they could reach their quotas.

I will now share with you, in brief, what we in the camps had to do just to survive. I was moved from Krakow to Mathousen, Austria and then to Steier to work at the Daimler automobile factory (the same company that was, until recently, in partnership with Chrysler). I was "employed" as a slave laborer, on the production line that assembled air-cooled engine. My job,

at first, was to install the manifold. Then I was made a machinist and was assigned to work on crankshafts... on a shaper machine that did the balancing. Shortly thereafter the Allies bombed our factory and I was moved to Guzen. There I was assigned to work on rifles... drilling out the long steel rods for barrels. That was unbearable work... burning hot oil that caused my hands to blister and contamination that prevented wounds from healing. And then, of course, we had our quota to meet. And when we failed to meet the quota, we were whipped as punishment for short-changing them on their production.

Our works shifts ran for twelve to sixteen hours and all that we were served as nourishment in a day was one ladle of soup... which was mostly water and, if we were lucky, the peels from potatoes that were served to the German troops... one ladle of coffee... and a small slice of bread (one small loaf was divided into twelve servings). After we were liberated by the Americans, their soldiers asked us why all of the piled high corpses had no buttocks. We told them that, in order to survive, many had turned to cannibalism.

As the war ended, we were scared... scared to death... that other prisoners would start killing us. And where could we go?... nobody wanted us. We had no homes anymore... we had nowhere left to return. Some of us did return to Poland in hopes of finding their loved ones and many of those survivors were killed by the Polish people... brutally beaten to death. Lies were told that Jews had killed a child so that they would have blood for their matzoh… forty Jews were killed as a result of that one lie.

It's an old story... blame the Jews for all of the ills of the world. One Polish citizen stood up many years later and apologized for what his countrymen did to the Jews who had returned home in search of their loved ones.... and that man was the Pope. But who did anything else? England, in the years following the war, tried to blockade us from entering Israel. During the war, the U.S. closed their doors to the Jews.

So what do you do when struggling through such horrific times? All that I had to keep me going was my faith. Faith, that one day I'll be able to survive and tell the story of what had happened. All the atrocities, all that the Germans did to us, all that everyone falsely accused us of, we still survived. And more than that...I am a victor over the Germans… I survived and I still have my faith in my religion. I am a Jew.

In 2004, my wife and I traveled to Eastern Europe and visited Poland. When we were in Krakow, we went on a tour to visit Jewish museums and the old Jewish sector of the city where many had died during the war. When the tour guide, a young woman, was telling about what had happened in that sector, my throat started to close and I was choking with emotion. I had suddenly remembered how, as a child, I was in a hospital with scarlet fever and a nurse came rushing in to me and told me to run because the Germans were coming to move the hospital. So I opened the window in my hospital room and jumped down two stories to the street below. Miraculously (or thanks to adrenalin and a convenient pile of sand) I didn't break my legs. The tour guide, seeing that I was upset, asked me what was wrong. I told her that there was once a children's hospital here. She asked me how I knew that and I told her that I was in that hospital and that I had to jump out of it to save my life. And I mentioned all the rest...that I had to hide out in an outdoor bathroom through a freezing cold night...and make my way back home for

warmth in order to survive. We found out later that the Germans came into the hospital, took out all of the sick children and slaughtered them. None survived. I escaped in the nick of time and so I am alive today.

When the Americans liberated our camp and saw all of the piles of the dead, they asked me how I had survived. I couldn't answer. But certainly, thinking back about it, God wanted me to survive and to be a witness to what had been done to us.

There were six of us, all young Jewish men, who joined together and left the camps to go look for our families. As we went towards Lintz, a city in Austria, I saw a boy coming in the opposite direction who was looking for his family. His name was Fritz Tiberger. I recognized him from school. I asked him if he saw anyone from my family. He told me that my brother Nathan was alive in Lintz.

When I found my brother there, we hugged and kissed and wouldn't leave each other's side. He was suffering from gangrene that was under his arm and on his back. The medical personnel had inserted tubes to drain off the pus. Thankfully he survived and we and eighteen others moved into a house. My brother did the cooking for us all... which was good because I had developed a severe case of diarrhea and I nearly died from dehydration... Nathan nursed me and fed me carefully so that I could survive and cheat death.

Later on, when we had moved to Germany, the Israeli army came to us and told us that they were organizing aliya and so we decided to go to Israel. That meant that first we had to travel to Italy.

We made it to Modena, Italy, where the Israeli Army was allowed to set up a camp. We were then moved to Southern Italy so that we could be more easily smuggled through the blockading English military and on to Israel. While in Italy, we learned that two of my father's sisters had survived the war. One was living in Belgium... she had survived by being hidden by gentiles. The other survivor was my aunt Rose... the one had had lost all three of her children and her husband.... she had moved to Belgium upon hearing that her sister was alive and living there.

My brother decided that he wanted to go fight in Israel for its independence. Before he left he tried to explain why he had chosen to do so. He said that if he had children someday, how could he tell them that he stood by and did nothing. He went on the ship The Altalena, the one which Ben Gurion sank off Haifa. Nathan made it into Israel anyway and joined the Army and his group was the one that fought Nassar of Egypt.

I want to stop remembering for a minute and explain something to you. What is a Holocaust survivor? A survivor is a person who, when he dreams at night, sees piles of corpses, their mouths open, their faces reflecting the pain of their horrific deaths and their voices screaming and asking for help. Some of them, their arms extended, are pleading to be pulled from their death pit. And these images cause me to remember that in my wife's last few years of battling diabetes, she developed gangrene on her foot. She was told that her leg had to be amputated in order to save her life. Hearing this, she went into a deep self-induced coma ... she stopped moving and the doctors and psychiatrists could do nothing to bring her out of it. Then

one day I received a call from the hospital that my wife wanted to speak with me. She had come out of the coma and decided that she wanted to have to surgery... she wanted to live. Surgery was scheduled for early the next morning. I arrived at the hospital that morning to be with her before they took her in and I was called over by the male nurse who was caring for her. He said “Can you image, your wife thinks that she’s in a concentration camp. She’s crazy.” I told his she’s not crazy... she’s re-living her past. I rushed to her room and found her lying there with her eyes wide open in fear. She told me to save myself... “I can’t run anymore,” she said. “I can’t go. I can’t do anything. Save yourself.” I tried to calm her down and it finally worked but she still insisted that I trust no one and that I save myself.

Such is the life of a Holocaust survivor ... living in today’s world but still with a foot in the past and memories always trying to pull you back into the darkness of the horror and despair.

Throughout the years I was asked by people how had I survived during those times. But as I would tell them the truth of what had happened, they would stop me and tell me that those were horrible times and we don’t want to hear about it anymore. And so, for many of the survivors, the past was a closed door... never to be opened. No one wanted to hear about it anymore. And that included the Jews who had not been touched by the horrors of the war.

So survivors only shared the memories with other survivors. We would have social gatherings following the war and talk of what we had seen... what we had lived through. Near the end of the war in Guzen, where I was, the Germans came in and slaughtered 500-600 young Jews. Thank goodness some of us survived and lived to tell the tale.

Another memory... the Germans had given us a loaf of bread that we were to divide among twelve people but they didn't provide us with a knife to slice it up. So I decided to make a knife in the factory. A German, who was behind me, saw what I was doing and thought that I was making a weapon. When he went into the office to report me, I ran away.

Being a survivor, all that we have are memories... memories of loved ones who we can never hug or kiss or talk to again... memories of thousands of slaughtered people, as far as the eye can see. All of them screaming, calling out for help, and no one around to hear their cries ... no one there to help them find their peace.

History tends to repeat itself. Today, anti-Semitism is growing once again. The world needs a scapegoat for all of its ills. It always has. But we won’t let it happen to us again. We will no longer be victims to any people or any nation on this planet. We have the same right as any people anywhere ... to live in peace and prosperity.

My thoughts now return once again to my last memory of my father. There he sat, on his bed in our apartment in the Ghetto, praying. And I am positive that before the Germans shot and killed him, he recited the Shema. I can still hear him, even today. And that's why, when it seems that there is nothing else left to hold on to, we have our faith and we continue to believe in our God.

Assemblymember Nathan Fletcher
District 75

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Edy Lange *Interviewed by Madeleine Jennewein*

Acknowledgements

Leslie Mills, Executive Director
Beth Israel

Edy Lange

By Madeleine Jennewein

Leaving for Minneapolis

Not every Holocaust story is a story of concentration camps or resistance. Some Holocaust survivors are the lucky ones who got out just before the worst atrocities began. One of these survivors is Edy Lange who survived almost a year in Nazi occupied Austria before she sailed for America on the Queen Mary.

Edy Lange never expected the Holocaust. She grew up in Vienna, Austria, relatively sheltered from the Nazi regime burgeoning nextdoor. Edy was born on February 19th 1923 as Edith Sonnenshein. She lost her mother at a very young age and lived with her brother, stepmother and an emotionally distant father. She lived a good life with school, friends and family until the German invasion that would change everything.

On March 12, 1938, as the family celebrated Edy's brother's birthday, the German army marched into Vienna. From this moment on her life would never be the same again. In that instant, her family lost everything. That night, her father's stationery store was smashed and looted; the next day the owner was not her father but a German shop-girl. In that one night other aspects of Edy's life changed forever too. Her high school, owned by a Jewish woman, closed and Edy was apprenticed to a seamstress simply to fill her time.

Immediately, the family knew that they would have to leave Austria. Even as most Jews stayed, refusing to believe the tales of death camps, Edy's father, motivated by a complete loss of income, fought to get the family free. To stay afloat that one perilous year, the family rented two of their rooms to an opera singer. Miraculously, it was this tenant who saved the family during that year by hanging a Nazi flag in the window.

Only a few weeks after the German invasion, Edy found herself standing in line for three days simply to gain a passport. While waiting, Edy and her father came up with an ingenious plan to speed their freedom; they would write letters. Knowing almost nothing about America, they picked ten of the largest cities and naively decided to write to the mayor and Chief Rabbi of each (unbeknownst to them, cities in America do not have Chief Rabbis). In complete secrecy Edy and her father Josef wrote the letters, mailing each at a separate mailbox. In November of that year, after waiting through almost eight months and many apologetic refusals, Edy and her father received a cable from Minneapolis containing only five words but giving them hope enough to carry the family through many more months of oppression. "Help is on its way."

Soon the family, barred as Jews from any form of transportation, found themselves walking miles and miles from their home in Vienna to the American Embassy. After two attempts, the first thwarted by the foreign holiday of Thanksgiving, Edy and her family received their affidavit, signed by some unknown benevolent soul in America. The family had to wait three more months for their departure in late February. Leaving behind family, friends, and Edy's brother they sailed off on the Queen Mary toward New York.

When Edy and her family docked, they found a new and unfamiliar country, dissimilar from their Vienna home. After one more week of disoriented travel, the family found its way to Minneapolis where a synagogue had asked a congregant to sponsor them in. Edy received no welcome but instead walked with her father from the train station into the suburbs to find the house of the congregant who signed their affidavit. Here she was really welcomed to America with a giant meal that she can still remember to this day.

Even though Edy was lucky to escape Austria, the Holocaust and the war formed a sharp boundary in her life that changed her forever. Only one day after reaching Minneapolis, Edy and her father parted company forever and she was left, at age 16, to support herself. Edy soon found a job in a textile factory and a friendly house in which to board. Edy joined many Jewish youth groups, which allowed her to meet her first husband, an ensign in the navy. Sadly, he was killed in the war.

Soon she met her second husband, Rolf Lange. With him she had three children and raised Rolf's two others. To this day Edy continues to help others, perpetuating the values of community service that she learned as a child. She writes regularly to servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan and to sponsor a Passover Seder for Jewish servicemen.

Assemblymember Paul Fong
District 22

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

German Ayzinger

Interviewed By Yasi Hatami and Hanna Hunt

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German Ayzinger

By Yasi Hatami and Hanna Hunt

Only the Beginning

The year was 1941. German Ayzinger, an upper class citizen of Chenwitz, was only seven years old when his mother came back from the market one Saturday to tell the family they all had to go to the ghettos. As they left their villa, cloth satchels slung over their backs with their remaining possessions, they had little time to get to the ghetto. Upon his arrival, German's grandfather was asked to denounce his bible by throwing it down and stepping on it. After he refused, he was beaten by the guards so brutally that he needed to go to a hospital. German's grandfather died soon after, leaving the Ayzinger family in mourning.

Their new home was like a prison, with high fences and tight living quarters. The terrible conditions were only exacerbated by the number of people forced to live under the same roof, making German's new home overcrowded. The only way to get in and out of the house was through the cellar and a system of underground tunnels that led to neighbors' houses. Along with cramped living quarters, the Ayzinger family faced economic hardships and violent anti-Semitism. The merchants that came through the ghetto charged unreasonably high prices for food and other necessities, so many families like German's often went hungry. A janitor in the ghetto, along with his son, attached a nail to the end of a piece of wood and used it to beat Jewish children, opening past physical and emotional wounds.

Faced with such terrible living conditions, German Ayzinger decided to escape from the ghetto and was successful after two attempts. The first time, he left by himself, and quickly became scared, lost, and hungry. The only place he really knew was his old home, but realized his home wasn't the same without his family. He eventually went back to the ghetto, but another opportunity to escape quickly arose. Word spread to the ghetto that the mayor of their old town Chenwitz was asking former business owners to come back to help train new employees. Because German's father used to own a business, the Ayzinger took advantage of situation and fled from the ghetto. They assumed they would be safe in their old home, but a former maid bravely informed the family that her husband, a powerful Nazi, knew they had escaped. Fearing the Nazi would apprehend them and return them to the ghetto, the Azinger family left their home and spent years on the run. The family had to go to great lengths to hide from the Nazis, sacrificing their belongings and in some cases their health. In one instance, German's mother had to pay their neighbor with her remaining jewelry in order to keep the family's location secret. Conditions were so bad that one time they had to hide in a basement flooded with water. Times were so hard on his family that when German's sister got sick there was nothing they could do. They couldn't see a doctor and unfortunately his sister ended up losing her ability to walk permanently.

Then in 1945 when the Holocaust ended, German Ayzinger and his family came out of hiding. German Ayzinger was then forced into the army to combat the threat of Russian communism. There he helped educated military supervisors. After he was release from service, German faced many challenges trying to go to college. There, his discovered his passion for

learning and teaching mathematics. His love was passed down the generations by his daughter and his grandson.

Today as we interviewed German Ayzinger, he has a huge smile on his face. A smile that says he is a very happy to be who he is and how he has lived his life. It is people like him – people that always will see the positive side of life – that make this word such a wonderful place.

Assemblymember Mary Hayashi
District 18

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Marion Samuel *Interviewed by Ellen C. Ryan*

Acknowledgements

Rita Greenwald Clancy, MSW
Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator/Case Manager
Jewish Family & Children's Services of the East Bay

Marion Samuel

By Ellen C. Ryan

"My Lost Youth"

My name is Marion Samuel. I am Czechoslovakian by birth. I was born in 1924, on July 24th. My birth name was Miriam Farkash. I was taken away from my home in the town of Dulovo in 1941.

The Nazis were occupying Hungary and we, in turn, were occupied by Hungary. They took my whole family: my parents, my seven brothers and me. The country was changing from Ukraine to Hungary to something else, like Russia, so each time there was a change, there was a new flag in everybody's window. The local, self-appointed officials thought they would keep the town quiet by removing anybody who might interfere. My father was a WWI vet who knew the law, so we were among the first removed. They put us on a train and took us to the Polish border. At the border, my father went to the Hungarian officer to ask why they were doing this. He said, "Are you Jews?" My father said, "Yes." He said, "Then you are not a citizen of any country."

From there, they herded us from town to town for three weeks, along with about half the Jewish population of the towns. The farmers would come out of the fields and hit us with their implements because we were supposed to be their enemies. They killed the babies. They took away the young men and killed them, like shooting fish in a barrel. We walked about 35 kilometers a day with little children. They brought us to Stanislawow and kept us outside a Gestapo prison for nine days with no food or water. When we asked for water, they said, "You're going to eat your children". That was the Gestapo.

They put us in a camp inside a ghetto, a four story building surrounded with wire. It was a lager called Rudolph's Mille. They took everybody who was able to work, including my father and three older brothers. To keep me from having to go with the others, my mother tied my little brother in a scarf around my neck so they would think I was his mother. We heard later they took those people away to dig long trenches, and then shot them. They just fell into the ditch, and people said later they didn't know if it was settling, or if they were still alive, but it was moving. When I heard that, I fainted. My father and my brothers were among them.

We were there until April, 1942. They had taken us from home around the end of June, 1941. I remember it was before my 17th birthday. They fed us once a day, hot water with some wheat grain in it. My little brother died of hunger. I remember his little belly was swollen. I became a helper in the kitchen because I was the only person who didn't have children or wasn't very old. The cook, a woman immigrant from Germany, picked me. The very young children all stayed together, and my little brothers were there. Once in a while the children got cream of wheat and she always had me wash the kettles, knowing I would scrape out anything I could eat.

In April, they came in trucks and took everybody away, including my little brothers. There was no resistance. The trucks were coming and going all afternoon. Our beds on the

fourth floor were on sawhorses and boards. We hid under them and were very quiet. They came to the fourth floor in the late afternoon, just before dark, with the dogs. The dogs, of course, smelled us right away, but as she came out, my mother pushed the board down on me so they wouldn't see me, and she went with them. I remember my heart was beating so hard I felt the floor moving.

My mother managed to slip off the truck when it was getting dark. Somehow, she survived, but it took her two days to walk back. We tried for some time to think of a way to escape. We saw the horses and wagons taking the dead through the gate to the Jewish cemetery. Finally, one day we sneaked onto the side of one of the wagons waiting to go out to the cemetery, where we hid in the tall grass until night. And then we walked. And we walked, for close to six months, until we came close to the border. A relative by marriage had written to us that if we could make it to the border he would try to help us cross. He was in a group of laborers forced to dig foxholes and clear roads for the Germans and Hungarians. At that point, the Hungarians caught us, and once again we had to use our wits to escape. We hid in the woods above the place this relative was and he found us. He shared his food, but was unable to help us cross the border. Then one day I saw my father in a dream, saying, "Don't worry, and just go." In the morning, my mother and I woke up, but we didn't say a word to one another. I never told her. She never told me anything either. We started walking. We walked across the border ourselves. If somebody had found us, we would have been shot.

We had crossed back into Czechoslovakia, but it was still occupied by Hungary. We went to the police and gave our names. We expected they were going to ask for a pardon for us or apologize for taking us illegally, but instead he asked, "How come your husband and your boys didn't come back? How come just you two women came back? You two were prostitutes for the Germans." I was afraid to stay home alone. The day we were supposed to meet with the police, my mother said she didn't know where I was.

Somehow my mother got together enough money for me for a one-way ticket to Kishvarda on the expectation of a job, which had vanished by the time I arrived. Several people were kind to me and helped me find work and places to stay. I already knew my father wasn't alive, so I changed my name to my mother's Germanic name, Ausch, in hopes of evading the gendarmes if they looked for me. Because I had been in the woods for such a long time, I started getting all kinds of diseases. I got whooping cough first. I had tonsillitis three times. And then I had malaria. In that city they had never heard of malaria ever. The doctor said I had to move, for my own health. I went to Nyiregyhaza and stayed with a woman with two children, whose husband was away. She was very good to me. We were like two sisters.

Then things started happening there. I was scared. People around me weren't so scared because they didn't know what was going on. I was telling them, but they didn't believe me. They thought I was making up stories. People sometimes don't want to believe. Then I received a postcard from my mother. A supposed friend had sold her out for a few dollars. She just wrote me that she was caught. I fainted. I don't cry easily. I don't get hysterical…but I faint. Soon I was taken to a ghetto, next a work camp, and then I was sent to Auschwitz. They put us in cattle cars for three or four days with no water. I was keeping a notebook of what was happening to me all along, but when we came to Auschwitz, they took everything we had - jewelry, all of our

clothes. When we went in where they told us to go, I had to leave it. The only thing I wish I could have kept was my notebook.

We went into this building and from the ceiling were hair clippers hanging; they shaved our heads and our privates. We showered, and they sprayed us with some type of chemical. From there we went to the front and were given a grey-green prisoner dress, no underwear, no shoes. Then they marched us by fours to the barrack, and if somebody got out of line, they got hit. We were packed like sardines, thirteen to a bunk space. There was no room for all of us to stand in that place, but they had us stand in rows of four, morning and night, to be counted. People were hungry and exhausted, and if somebody fainted, they took them out and shot them. We would stand for hours there sometimes. If anyone fell down, they would be killed. For breakfast, we were given brown water with drugs in it to keep us docile. So everybody was going around just like they were dead. Once in a while they gave us bread made from sunflower, I suppose, and sawdust. Then, at night they gave us water in which they had cooked sugar beet leaves. If you went close to the wire fences on the perimeter of the property and touched it, you got electrocuted.

I was among a few women from our barrack picked to carry food to the next camp because there wasn't a kitchen yet. The crematorium was in the same camp as I was in, and as soon as it was empty, they would fill it up again. So they went camp by camp. We carried coffee and soup to the Czech side. The Germans went with us, so we would very seldom talk to each other because we were afraid. On one trip, there was such a stench, and dark smoke coming up from a chimney, I said to the other girl, "I wonder what that is." I didn't know…even though I had been through so much, I still didn't know. And I said to the girl, "I wonder about that smoke, you see that barrack smoke?" She didn't say anything, but the German who was walking with us, our escort, said, "Dummkopf! (Stupid!) It's your families burning." Some days later, they brought us soap. It was grey, ash-grey. They were giving everybody soap, even though we had no way to wash. The SS woman giving it out said, "Here is the soap made out of the fat of your families." They did it on purpose to try to make you scared, petrified. That's how it was in Auschwitz.

One day they had us undress and go outside naked, where an SS man and an SS woman were waiting for us with a big dog. They always went around with the dogs. With a stick they picked out two hundred people, including me, and sent us to build another camp that we dug out by hand. They covered the roof with grass, so it just looked like a little hill. When they chose us, they took us someplace where we took a shower, a real shower with soap, and they gave us civilian clothes. I got a pale blue flannel dress with flowers on it. It was an old dress, but it had sleeves.

A German officer, not an SS man, came to watch us work. Because I could speak a little German, he took me to work elsewhere. I was scared out of my mind. As we walked through the camp, he saw how scared I was. So he said to me, "What's your name?" I said, "Marion." He thought about it for a moment and asked, "Mariana? Mariana, are you scared?" I said, "Yes." I thought he had the intention of making me into a prostitute – young girls often were. I had on a pretty dress, and my curly hair was growing back after three months. So he said, "Do you want to bring somebody else with you?" And I said, "Yes." I chose another girl to go with me. She

worked for him and I worked for a general, cleaning their boots and their rooms. I was never to be in the room when he was there, or touch anything I wasn't supposed to touch, and they had a radio. We were also assigned to work in the SS kitchen. We washed the big kettles, we washed the floors every night in the kitchen, and worked every morning in the officers' quarters. Another prisoner was their barber. He was in the front, so when we were cleaning the boots, he was there. When he saw me, he said, "I promised myself that the first girl I see, I'm gonna ask her to marry me." I turned him down, but I introduced him to my friend. They married a couple of weeks after we were liberated.

The camps could not handle the number of people coming in. The crematory could only dispose of so many bodies. As the overcrowding worsened, they moved us to Lager Six for six months, then they sent us on a death march. We walked four abreast with a row of guards on either side of our column. We were sometimes ordered to get down, to avoid being seen by Allied planes flying over. Once when I did not move fast enough, a woman guard struck me hard across my left breast, leaving a permanent scar. As we marched, we got fresh guards in every town, but, bit by bit we noticed their numbers dwindle. They were quietly deserting. At last, they ordered us into an abandoned military building and told us not to come out for at least two hours. When we started peering out after only an hour, they were gone. We saw instead Allied Jeeps and a truck. We learned later they had been just across the river for three days, which they had spent building a pontoon bridge. The war was over.

Allied soldiers came at the end of the death march and freed us on May 1, 1945. When I was freed from the concentration camp, we were someplace in Germany. Czechoslovakia was already free. And some military trucks came and said, "Whoever is from Czechoslovakia can come with us and we will take you back to Czechoslovakia." I was the only surviving member of my entire extended family and one of only four Jews left from our town. After the war, in August, I married a young man, Bernard Samuel, who was the son of my aunt's neighbor. We spent quite awhile in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany, and, in 1948, came to the United States. We had three daughters and a long life together. He was ill for the last several years of his life and passed away last year. Two of our daughters live close by and the other is in Seattle,

Assemblymember Edward P. Hernandez, O.D.
District 57

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Jack Brauns — *Interviewed by Stephannie D. Ramirez*
Howard Brookfield — *Interviewed by Simi Sardana*

Acknowledgements

Recollections and Reflections: How I Turned Despair Into An Appreciation of Life, by Jack Brauns, FACS
www.jackbraunsmd.com

Jack Brauns, M.D., FACS

By Stephannie D. Ramirez

The Story of a Man who Turned Despair into Hope, Happiness and an Appreciation of Life

Jack Brauns was born in Riga, Latvia in 1924, and later grew up in the city of Kaunas (pre-1914 Russian name Kovno), Lithuania, south of Latvia. In Lithuania people were wealthy in culture. His family consisted of his brother, mother, father and himself. His brother, Harry ,was five years younger than him, and when Harry was born the family shifted from speaking Russian to German. Jack and Harry's father, Dr. Moses Brauns, was born in Zagarai in 1895, in a Jewish Pale of Settlement. He attended Cologne Medical School in Germany and received his medicine diploma in 1922, to later become Chief of the Department of Contagious Diseases in Kaunas. Jack's mother, Basia Patursky was born in Riga in 1896. She attended a French school in Riga and graduated specializing in languages, becoming fluent in English, Russian, German, French, Lithuanian, Yiddish and Latvian. She became known for publishing the first English teaching book in Lithuania. They both met when Jack's mother went from Riga to Vilijandi to visit her uncle. They married in May 1922, the same year they settled in Kaunas.

Jack attended the Hebrew High School (Schwabes) in Lithuania. Before the war began Jack had a very active Jewish life where he celebrated all of the Jewish holidays. Since the war began in 1941, the Soviet forces then occupied Lithuania and closed down Jack's school, being replaced by Shalom Aleichem Yiddish School. Before the war began Jack's father, Dr. Moses Brauns, had gone to Vilnius to be in charge of fighting and containing the epidemic of typhus caused by drinking water contaminated by sewage. The morning before the beginning of the war Jack's father called and informed his family that the epidemic was officially ended and that he would be headed back home the next day.

Little did Dr. Moses Brauns know that the next day the war would begin. When he finally arrived home, he found out that the German Army crossed the Soviet border and was on its way to Kaunas. Two days later, a driver, sent by the Lithuanian Soviet government, arrived at Jack's house to evacuate the whole family from their home. Yet his father refused to evacuate due to the fact that he still had several patients to care for in the hospital.

"Everything was very organized," explained Jack. The German government planned out how to settle Jewish people in the ghetto, which was located in the oldest part of the city. In August 1941 the gates were closed, but things didn't get any better. Living quarters were calculated by the German government. Jack lived in the second floor of a three-story apartment building. His three bedroom apartment was shared with two other Jewish families; there was one family per room. Life in the ghetto was very much controlled by the Nazis. People in the ghettos were forced to work in the city, and at the same time they took the opportunity to trade some of their belongings for food and sneak it in once they went back to the ghetto. The Chief of Police was one of those people, who would often bring food for Jack's family. He did this out of gratitude because Dr. Moses Brauns had saved the life of the Chief's wife during hospitalization at the contagious disease hospital. After spending three years in the ghetto, on

July 13, 1944, the German SS found Jack and his family in a hiding place and took them to Stutthoff Concentration Camp in Germany.

Jack was later separated from his mother and brother as he and his father were sent to Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany. There he became labeled as prisoner number 84481. His survival in the Dachau Concentration Camp was possible due to the things he learned from his parents. His mother encouraged him to be fluent in many different languages especially German. His father taught him the importance of cleanliness. Jack learned how to stay clean by waking up half an hour earlier than the others to clean his body with sand like soap to prevent infections. He also survived due to multiple things he knew how to do. He learned how to be a craftsman, he learned how to work with pieces of iron and create things with them, and he also gained knowledge in carpentry which benefited him as well.

On April 29, 1945 Jack was liberated at Dachau Concentration Camp by the United States Army. To this day he still celebrates that day as his second birthday, as his second chance to life. The first thing Jack and his father did when they got out was to look for his mother and brother. They looked for their names on the bulletin boards posted outside the camp with the names of the survivors at other camps. Unfortunately, they did not see the names listed, but they were both determined to find them so they signed up to return to Lithuania. Once Jack and his father arrived at the airport they were put on separate flights. Since his father was a physician he was assigned to be transported with sick people. Jack ended up staying behind in Germany because the plane he was scheduled to board was having mechanical defects, and so he was back in Dachau once again.

Eventually Jack arrived in Budapest. There he recognized a man named Dr. Simon Dolnitzky who had worked with his father in the ghetto, and he informed Jack that he had seen his mother a week before and that she returned to Vilnius. Unfortunately he also informed Jack that his brother did not survive the Holocaust, dying at the age of 13 in Stuttoff. Luckily, his mother did survive but all three reunited much later in California. In Italy Jack enrolled at the University of Turin where he studied medicine for six years and graduated with a doctor's degree in medicine.

Jack completed his internship (1951-1952) at St. Elizabeth in New Jersey. He then went on to surgical residency (1952-1956) at Lincoln Hospital in Bronx, New York. His next surgical training was at the University of Pennsylvania in academic medicine. He became a Fellow of the American College Surgery (FACS). Jack accomplished his lifelong dream to become a physician like his father, Dr. Moses Brauns, and practiced in La Puente, California as a General Surgeon.

After practicing medicine for 45 years, Jack decided to retire four years earlier to recuperate the time lost in the concentration camps. When asked how he could forgive the people that harmed him and his family, he answered, "You cannot hate people, it will kill you. You can forgive but not forget." That was his motivation to write Recollections and Reflections, a book of his life in detail. His kind heart is honorable, refusing to hold any hatred towards anyone. His perspective of life is admirable; witnessing such horrific incidents and facing severe mistreatment and maintaining the ability to see the positive things in life is amazing. Instead he

offers positive advice, to study and get an education. "Always better yourself, as long as you strive to achieve your goals you will be successful," he notes. "Life is exciting," Jack repeated with a smile as he concluded his story. Jack now spends his time with family which includes his wife, Joyce, his three daughters, Alicia, Janine, and Suzette, his son-in-law, Jay and his grandson Joshua. He also loves lecturing to hundreds of students and continues his legacy of appreciation of life.

Howard Brookfield

By Simi Sardana

From West Germany to the United States: A Survivor's Story of Escape to Freedom

Howard Brookfield was raised in Darmstadt, Germany; a city once known for its beautiful architecture. Howard lived in Germany with his father, mother, and two brothers. His father and grandfather owned a lumberyard and mill which gave them enough money to afford a comfortable lifestyle that included a maid. Life in Germany was good prior to World War II and Nazism. His family observed all the Jewish holidays and attended the synagogue regularly.

In 1933 Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany, and it was not long until Howard's life would change forever. Darmstadt was the first city in Germany that began closing down Jewish shops early. Howard attended parochial grade school and recalls non-Jewish kids bullying him on his way home from school. This bullying was not the kind of rough housing that normal grade school boys encounter; but the kind of bullying mentality that led to sayings like "get a Jew, win a prize." Eventually, Howard and his family could no longer go to many public places including the library and many grocery stores. Howard still remembers one kind grocer who would sneak him a cube of butter and eggs so that his family might eat dinner.

As more time passed the situation in Germany worsened, and Howard and his family knew the only way to avoid inevitable harm was to leave the country. The German government began confiscating all Jewish belongings, leaving very little behind. Howard's family, like other Jewish families, was allowed one container to store all their belongings in.

In December 1937 Howard (at eight years old), along with his family, left Germany. In those days in order to immigrate into the United States you had to have a sponsor living in the country. Fortunately, for Howard his grandparents from his mother's side had left Germany for the United States in 1932. His grandparents signed an affidavit assuring the American government that the Brookfields would never be the government's responsibility. Howard boarded a boat leaving Germany, and seven days later arrived in New York on New Years. Their stay in New York lasted only a day before they boarded a train that took them directly to San Francisco where Howard's relatives lived.

Howard enrolled in second grade speaking no English when his family settled in San Francisco. Every Saturday Howard would go to the movies and within six months he was fluent in English and lost his accent. Howard's father, a successful business owner, now had very little options for work. As Howard recalls, his father bought a 1936 green Chevrolet with yellow spokes, cleaning supplies, and went door to door offering cleaning services. Life had dramatically changed from their days in pre war Germany, but Howard recalls that his family had to adopt the mentality that *if you need to, you can do anything*. His family was able to escape the atrocities of the Holocaust and make a peaceful life in the United States. He and his family lived on a corner three bedroom house in San Francisco. Howard also served three and a half years in the United States Air Force.

Howard later met Miriam Fleischmann, also a Holocaust survivor from Germany. They married in 1953 and have lived in several places throughout California. They now reside in Whittier, California where they attend Temple Ner Tamid in Downey. Roughly sixty years later Howard returned to Germany for the first time with his beautiful wife Miriam to try to recollect their memories of their hometowns. Although Howard was very young, he clearly remembered all the landmarks of Darmstadt, as he knew his neighborhood like the palm of his hand.

As Howard sits and recollects the injustices he and his wife faced during this time it is clear that the pain has not gone away. He understands that they were the fortunate ones, but there were many who were not. Howard's father's parents did not make it out of Germany alive. They were sent to a concentration camp where they, along with six million Jews, died. Howard is fearful of what is to come. He is bothered by the reoccurrence of genocides, wondering why we have not learned from the Holocaust. He believes in protecting our civil liberties, the same civil liberties taken away by Hitler and the Nazi regime.

Howard is a man full of life. He lived through the darkest time in our world's history and survived. He found his soul mate that shares his similar background and they have traveled the world creating new, happier memories. Howard is now retired from the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department's Reserve Forces Bureau after working with them on a volunteer basis for thirty-one years. Currently Howard teaches computer classes at La Mirada Senior Net. He is co-chair of the Jewish Community Forum at Chapman University, which hosts five lectures annually. Howard has also resided as president over two synagogues. Howard, and his wife Miriam, are valued members of their community and their story will be forever remembered.

Assemblymember Jerry Hill
District 19

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Renee Duering	*Interviewed by Jessica Clary and Gina Palomar*
Helen Farkas	*Interviewed by Cathryn Dalton*
Harry J. Kennedy	*Interviewed by Jennifer Thomas and Avery Phelan*
Bill Rooz	*Interviewed by Alex Owens and Jake Nilson*
Miriam Shlomo	*Interviewed by Georgialeen Hart, Translated by Ioana Ioanovich*

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Ioana Christina Ioanovici, Stanford University

Sandra Nicholson, Jefferson High School, Daly City, CA

Barbara Campbell, Social Science Department Chair, Mills High School, Millbrae, CA

Renee Duering

By Jessica Clary and Gina Palomar

The Fight to Stay Alive

During our interview, we learned about the hardships Ms. Duering has endured on her journey. Ms. Duering's journey started when she heard a voice announcing Hitler was going to throw anyone who was not his "standard of perfection" into gas chambers. She explained what she had heard to her father, who did not believe that anything major would happen. Then, Ms. Duering and her family began to travel further to flee from the dangers of being captured by the Nazis. During this time, Ms. Duering met and married her husband, a Jewish man, who swept her off her feet. Eventually, the Nazis captured Ms. Duering, her husband, and the rest of her family. They were subsequently taken to Auschwitz.

At the camp, the prisoners were desterilized, shaven, and tattooed so that they could then be put in their barracks. As she was tattooed with the number 62501, the Nazi tattooist said, "Be grateful you get a number." The people who did not get a number went straight to the gas chambers. Ms. Duering was then chosen as one of the one hundred women to undergo medical experimentation. These experiments were lead by Dr. Samuel Maximulem, who was in World War I and worked with the Nazis. His experiments focused on cervical cancer. He tried to desterilize one of Ms. Duering's ovaries, but failed to do so. Ms. Duering was injected forty-seven times in her back with a virus. It gave her a disease that made her throat swell up, so that she could barely breathe. She lived in a house where the person bunking above her died from the same disease. She tried to notify the Nazi guard of what happened to the lady, but the guard would not help her.

During Ms. Duering's imprisonment at Auschwitz, she lived in Block 10. On the other side was Block 11, which was a bunker for prisoners in the concentration camp. Between these two blocks lay her worst memory of the camp: the Black Wall. Every morning, people were shot and killed at the wall. They were later taken away and disposed of. Every morning, she had to deal with death as others in her bunker would look through a peep hole to see the prisoners die. When all hope seemed to be lost, a man came up to her from Block 9 and said that he could help her if she helped him. She was able to teach him sign language and the alphabet in exchange for information about her family. Once this happened, she came upon a man that played the piano beautifully. She said she loved the music, and knew how to write notes. Because of this, she was able to get out of the concentration camp by writing symphonies.

She kept a low profile for a time after escaping the camps, because she did not want people to know that she had been there. She met a man that had worked the gas chambers at a concentration camp, instrumental in many Jewish deaths. After being out for some time, she came across a man in a park that had worked the gas chambers at a concentration camp, instrumental in many Jewish deaths. He said something that moved her: "Those were the good old days, when the Jews were among us." Ms. Duering said nothing for fear of the possibility that he was another Nazi, trying to recapture her. She realized that sometimes, it is good to say nothing when you have doubts.

Helen Farkas

By Cathryn Dalton

Never to be Forgotten

It is difficult to comprehend the nature of the inhumanity during the Holocaust when six million Jews were put to their death to satisfy the needs of the Nazis who wanted to eradicate Europe of all Jews. Anti-Semitism existed even before Hitler came to power, but the extent to which he would go to achieve his goals had far reaching, devastating effects on many Jewish communities. The survivors who have lived to share their stories of suffering, loss, pain, and hope have touched our hearts and we are fortunate that we have been able to document their experiences to ensure that they will always be remembered.

Helen Farkas was born in the Romanian town of Satu-Mare in 1920. She was one of nine children raised by a shoemaker and a housewife. Her father had previously served in the Austro-Hungarian army during WWI before she was born. Although her father spent four years in America prior to WWI, he was unable to go back to the US after returning home to collect his wife. By then, Austria-Hungary had instituted a draft and he was forbidden to leave. There was a decent Jewish population in her hometown, and prior to the beginning of the war, discrimination towards Jews was not prevalent. However in 1940, when Romania fell under Hungarian rule, Helen and her family began to experience what would become the first indications of a society intent on isolating the Jewish people. Jewish families found their freedom taken away as new laws were passed that restricted their rights, many losing their jobs in the process. For three years, Helen and her family listened to stories on the radio about German atrocities being committed towards Jews, but they were unable to grasp the reality of the situation. They watched as the non-Jewish people around them started to believe the Nazi propaganda that told of an inferior Jewish race. How horrible it felt when people would stare at Helen as if she was something to be feared. Then, in 1943, Jews were forced to wear the yellow Star of David on their clothes. People then started to publicly humiliate them, forcing them to retreat into their homes and remain in seclusion. Helen's father told her, "Don't cringe or hide in shame… You have nothing to be ashamed of. You are a law-abiding person." Despite what her father told her, Helen and her siblings resented the isolation that was forced upon them. Losing all faith in the "Voice of America," which they decided was just American propaganda, Helen and her family awaited their "Day of Fate." Unsure and afraid of what their future could possibly hold, they lived in constant worry, while preparing for the worst.

In 1944, a law was passed declaring that all Jews were to be placed in "ghettos." In the spring of 1944, Helen and her family were forced to leave behind their life in Satu-Mare and comply with "the ones with guns." The despair Helen felt as she had to "put the lock on her home and walk away" is ineffable. The devastation of not knowing when she would ever see her home again is a painful memory she has trouble expressing. In an attempt to explain how she felt, she told of her pets that she had to leave behind. She had a dog and a cat who she left with one of her best friends, a non-Jewish woman named Julia. Julia was a little bit older than Helen, and she was already married. A close friend of the family, Julia spent a lot of time with Helen, and she tried to help her family as much as she could. But Julia's husband was a Nazi, so she

wasn't always able to be there for Helen. Helen was also separated from her fiancée, Joe Farkas, a famous Romanian soccer player. Joe was also Jewish, and had been serving as a cook in a forced labor camp since 1942.

On May 21st, 1944, the residents of the ghetto where Helen and her family were now living were told they were to be moved out of the ghetto the next day and put to work in factories. Helen stayed up all night weighing her belongings (they were only allowed to take a certain amount of kilograms with them) and worrying about the next day. Then, on May 22nd 1945, Helen and many other Jews were packed into a dirty cattle car and shipped off without knowing their destination. Helen could not send a letter to Joe to tell him where she was going or whether or not she was still alive, as no one, not even her old neighbors, would mail her letter for her. She describes it as if she had "disappeared off the face of the Earth." Still, Helen and her family were happy to leave the ghetto. They could not imagine any place more terrible. Little did they know where they were to arrive next.

Crossing the border out of Hungary, Helen had a horrifying encounter with the border patrol. When the cattle car stopped at the border, they accused all the Jews of smuggling valuables and they demanded that they give them up or be shot. Helen's brother Andor, a tailor, had sewn his last bit of money into the cuffs of his sleeves. Afraid of being killed if he was discovered with the money, Andor hastily cut open his sleeves and threw the money into the border guard's hat. However, he accidentally cut one of the bills in half, and the guard, finding the other half, demanded to know who still had half of a piece of money. Helen, afraid they would shoot her brother if he was caught, took the piece of money and gave it back to the guards. For this, she was severely beaten, but she knew if she hadn't given herself to the guards, it would have cost her brother his life.

Finally, after three days in an unsanitary and crowded cattle car, Helen and her family arrived at Auschwitz. As soon as they stepped off the car, they saw men in "striped pajamas" with no hair. The camp was surrounded with barbed wire fences. German SS guards were yelling at them to hurry up as they scrambled to get their belongings together and get off of the cattle car. Residents in the striped pajamas were telling all the young mothers, including Helen's sister Ethel, to give their children to an older person. Confused, Ethel refused to let go of her child. However, when Helen and Ethel went back to the car to get the rest of their things, they left Ethel's son Gyurika with Ethel's mother-in-law. Before they knew it, Ethel and Helen were being pushed off in the opposite direction from the rest of their family, and Ethel was beat back by the SS guards as she screamed for her child, who was desperately crying out for his mother. This would be the last time Ethel and Helen would ever see Gyurika, Andor, and their mother.

After being inspected by Dr. Joseph Mengele and deemed healthy enough for work, Helen and Ethel were led off with a crowd of other hysterical women mourning over the loss of their loved ones. They were forced to remove all of their clothes, and after being thoroughly inspected, they were taken into a room where they were shaved from head to toe and disinfected. Then, they were allowed to shower. Next, they were given thin clothing and sent off to their barracks. Their *Blockelteste*, a Slovak Jewish woman in charge of keeping order in their barracks, let them know that the dark smoke coming out of the large chimneys was the flesh of their families.

Helen remained in Auschwitz until October, where she endured cruel treatment and starvation alongside her sisters. They were oblivious to the horrors that were going on around them and Helen was not allowed to contact Joe at all. Finally, Helen and her friends were taken out of Auschwitz and put to work digging ditches and preparing the countryside for an Allied approach. As winter approached, the workers were forced to labor in the freezing cold, many people were freezing to death and dying of exhaustion. She feared for the safety of her crippled niece, Irene. They'd managed to hide her deformity from the doctors at Auschwitz, but Irene couldn't handle being forced to do hard physical labor. Eventually, Irene was put to work in the kitchens, which allowed Helen and her family at times to sneak food away from the kitchen.

Then, in January of 1945, the Death March began: Hitler's final attempt to carry out the Final Solution as well as hide the evidence of German atrocities. Himmler ordered that all Jews be evacuated from the concentration camps and moved to the interior of the Reich. The SS tried to burn down the remaining camps, but the Soviets discovered the first camp at Majdanek in July of 1944 and the evidence they found, an abundance clothing, personal belongings, and even hair, indicated the possibility of mass killings. Along the Death March, the weak were killed and the marchers were forced to bury their own dead. Most died from the cold, given nothing to sleep under even in the freezing weather. Helen somehow managed to survive due to her overwhelming strength.

One night in April of 1945, while the guards were asleep in their tents, Helen and Ethel managed to crawl away from the rest and roll down a hill. They found refuge in a tool shed for three nights, and then left to go find food. They made their way back home by moving from house to house with the help of very kind and helpful people. After a miraculous escape from Nazi cruelties, Helen and Ethel made their way back to Satu-Mare. They found Joe and his best friend Alex, and soon after Helen and Joe were married. However, Satu-Mare was soon occupied by the Soviets, and it fell under the Communist regime. But, in December of 1948, Helen and Joe, along with Ethel and some other close relatives, escaped from behind the Iron Curtain into Hungary.

Eventually, Helen and Joe moved to the United States and settled in a Jewish Community in Milwaukee. They came to California in 1950 so Joe and Alex could play for a San Franciscan soccer team. Helen and Joe have found happiness and prosperity in America with their daughter, Amber, and their granddaughter, Kailei. Helen has published a memoir titled *Remember the Holocaust* and she speaks at many schools throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Mercy High School in San Francisco has dedicated a library to them called "The Helen and Joe Farkas Center for the Study of the Holocaust in Catholic Schools." It is Helen's wish that her story be told and remembered, and with her book she hopes to spread awareness about the horrors of the Holocaust and prevent future tragedies of its kind.

Helen's story is that hope can exist in a world full of despair, despite the improbability of her survival. Helen never gave up the hope that one day her life would get better. Even after seeing her loved ones die and those around her suffer, Helen's will to survive prevailed over the futility she felt at times to persevere. Helen is truly an inspirational person, and her story has

inspired me to never take what I have for granted, and to always be optimistic. Her story is one that deserves to be told, and it is certainly one that is never to be forgotten.

Harry J. Kennedy

By Jennifer Thomas and Avery Phelan

Dawn After the Night

"I was the cat's meow. You may not see it now, but I was." Despite the brutal hardships, Harry Kennedy faced throughout his teenage years, and well into his young adult life, he managed to transcend such brutality and become a successful man in the United States.

Harry Kennedy was born in 1924 in Cologne, Germany. His given name was Ernst Katz. After spending five years in a German orphanage, Harry was adopted by another Jewish family and his last name became Kahn. Directly after his adoption, Harry moved to Mannheim, a populous and urban city in Germany. Harry was then raised in Mannheim and attended a German high school, much like all of the other children in his community.

The Kahns first recognized that trouble was stirring when major inflation in Germany started to become overwhelming in 1929. Four years later, in 1933, Hitler and his army came to power. Almost immediately, Hitler installed laws that made all Jews wear a yellow Star of David on all of their clothing and made shop owners hang a star in their business' window. This, however, did not make the Kahns nervous. They believed that the Germans would never allow anything drastic to happen to the Jewish community. Not too long after, in 1938, Harry attended a German high school in Mannheim.

Everything was completely fine until one regular day at school: two German Schutzstaffel- or SS police as they are commonly known- walked into the classroom and called seven names, Harry being one of the seven. The officers then told these boys that they were expelled from the school and that they would face serious punishment if they ever came back. No explanation was given to the young men other than that they were being expelled on the account that they were Jewish. As Harry turned to leave, his professor told him that he should avoid his regular route home, as there was a good chance he would be attacked if he did so. Walking out of the building, Harry saw every other Jewish student or faculty member leaving with him. Every Jewish man or woman, student or professor, was forced to leave the school. As if this wasn't dumbfounding enough, Harry saw a woman being thrown to her deathout of the second story window by the SS police.

Then, the sudden shriek of bombs filled the air, as officers began to use TNT to explode Jewish community centers, businesses, synagogues, and homes. Even more shocking, Jewish people who were hospitalized were thrown out of their beds – some were beaten prior to being forced out. Harry's mother, who had been hospitalized with kidney issues, was expelled from the hospital herself.

Scared and confused of what his friendly community had become, Harry quickly hurried home. As he arrived, he asked his neighbors if they knew what was going on. To his surprise, his next door neighbors, for whom he had always done chores and regularly walked their dog, would not even look him in the eyes, much less speak to him. This is when Harry fully realized that the

Jewish members of his community were being shunned for reasons unbeknownst to him. Harry just hurried inside his house to escape the noise of explosions and discrimination infecting his hometown.

At home, Harry, his mother and grandmother feared what was going to happen to them and their family. Harry's father, who owned and operated his own paper business, was currently away in Switzerland on business. Harry's three half-brothers lived in Germany, away from home. The rest of Harry's extended family lived in Germany as well, but not anywhere close by. Because of this, they had no way of contacting each other, especially because of the high censorship the government was imposing.

A couple of day later, the Kahns worst fear became reality. All of the Jews in their community were being relocated immediately. Harry was woken at two in the morning by his mother, telling him to keep quiet and pack only what he desperately needed. Dazed and confused, Harry threw his most precious belongings, necessary clothing and toiletries in a bag. As he walked downstairs, he found SS officers looting his house for anything of possible cash value. Harry's mother tried to take some of their belongings back from the officers, screaming that the precious family heirlooms were hers. To Harry's shock, the officers only beat her off. Harry longed to help his mother, but could only stop and stare, unable to move as he knew he would too be beaten - or worse killed - had he tried to fight. As Harry and his mother began to leave the house, Harry had to say goodbye to his grandmother, who was being put on a different train, with all of the other elderly men and women of the community. For the first time in his life, Harry's grandmother blessed him. In that final moment, Harry realized he would never see his grandmother again. Today, we know without a doubt that the train Harry's grandmother was put on was taken directly to a major concentration camp where all of the elderly were immediately put into the furnace to burn to death, or gassed to death in a gas chamber.

Harry and his mother then boarded the train, which was overpopulated with Jewish men, women, and children. After a long and uncomfortable ride, the train reached the German-Swiss border. The men and women were unloaded and told by SS officers to get in line. Then, everyone was sorted by gender, age and ability to work. Efficiently and mercilessly, everyone was loaded off of the train and into the concentration camp. As Harry was in line with the other men, his name was called and he was told to go see a special SS officer immediately. When he reached the officer, the man told him that they knew of his father's presence in Switzerland. Because of this, Harry was set free to join his father for reasons he still does not know today; however, Harry's mother was not allowed to join him, and even worse, he was not allowed to see or speak to her before he left.

When Harry reached his father, he told him of what had happened, and his father explained to him that a German policeman had told him not to return to Germany, as he would be killed. For about a year, Harry lived with his father in Switzerland. They lived with as much peace as they could muster, having been stripped of their family, belongings, and father's business. Then, in 1939, Harry joined his cousin in Italy, where his cousin got him on a boat for America, the S.S. Saturnia. Harry traveled alone to America, determined to begin a new life, but not before he attained justice for all of the wrongdoings that had been imposed upon him and his family.

When Harry arrived in New York, he enlisted in the Army. He volunteered as a paratrooper, and was sent to Georgia for parachuting school. Harry's only demand to the army was that he was enlisted in a unit that fought against the Germans. Harry was granted his wish, but before he left for the German war fields, his commanding officer advised to him that he change his name, so that in case he was ever captured, the Germans would take him for an American born and raised, and would not torture him for information. Harry agreed to the idea, and took the name Harry Kennedy from his given name of Ernst Kahn.

Harry was sent to Normandy, France, where he was originally stationed in June. By September, Harry reached the battlegrounds in Holland, Germany. As Harry's jumped out of the plane, parachuting to the ground, everything went as planned until he got caught in a tree. Struggling fiercely to cut himself out, Harry soon found that he had been discovered and taken hostage by German soldiers. Harry was taken to their base camp where he was sure he would meet his end. However, after the Germans read his dog tags, they did in fact take him for a true American. Fortunately, Harry spoke German, so he could understand every word the German soldiers were saying, however he did not dare to let the Germans know that. Harry saw that other members of his unit had been captured, and they were being held hostage next to him. The men were not allowed to speak to each other. Then, between the screams of bombs and machine guns firing, Harry was sure he heard classical music. Looking up, he saw a long line of American prisoners standing, blindfolded against a wall. Suddenly, the music ended.

After witnessing this, Harry was sure that if he did not escape, he would too, be shot to his death to the tunes of classical music. Communicating by eye contact alone, his fellow unit members and he were able to pull a surprise attack, grab rifles left on a nearby post and run from the Germans! Harry ran "like the dickens," following the trail of dead bodies back to his camp. Upon arrival, he yelled for his captain, and found him in the trench. Although enthused that Harry had escaped, his captain's first words to him were, "Goddamn it, Kennedy, you late again?" After fighting for several more months, World War II came to an end, and Harry and his unit were sent to Frankfurt, Germany.

Glad to make it back to "the friendliest nation on Earth" in 1945, Harry was determined to take advantage of the land of opportunity by getting the best education possible and becoming a successful man. Consequently, he enrolled in New York University where he met his wife. Since he had no money, or home, his wife was his ultimate support through college. Harry majored in government, and after graduation, worked for the US government in Federal Health Services. Harry has lived and worked all over the country, including New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago and Detroit, Michigan.

As soon as Harry got to America, he began to search for his lost biological family members. It took seven years of paperwork and searching, but ultimately Harry found that his mother, grandmother, all three of his half brothers and everyone else in his extended family had been killed in a concentration camp. The only surviving members of his family were his cousin, who had helped him get on the original boat to America, and his aunt who lived in Frankfurt. His cousin had managed to stay alive in a concentration camp in Italy, and his aunt had worked her way through the Holocaust as a seamstress.

Although Harry was heartbroken upon this news, he put his past behind him and began a family with his new wife after they married in New York. Harry worked for the government for over thirty years, and during that time, he raised two sons. Both of his sons went through school and college. One is now a school teacher, and the othera staff member at the University of California, Los Angeles. Today, Harry Kennedy is 85 years old and has several grandchildren who love him. Even today, anyone that meets Harry and knows of his story could not deny that he is the cat's meow. Harry's story, much like that of other Holocaust survivors, was life altering just to hear, and will be remembered for generations to come.

Bill Rooz

By Alex Owens and Jake Nilson

Bill Rooz's son came home from school one day, out of breath. When asked why, his son responded, "The other boys were throwing stones at me because I was Jewish, so I ran home." "Whenever a boy throws a stone at you, I want you to stop, pick it up and put it in your pocket. You remember the boy's face," said Bill. After school the next day, his son came home and emptied his pockets. Then, he took his son to the home of each child who had thrown rocks at him, and asked their parents, "Why did your son throw this at my boy?" As the fathers stood looking disturbed and embarrassed, Bill told the child, "I believe this stone belongs to you," handed them the stone and walked away.

Bill Rooz was born in February of 1926 in the town of Berehovo in what is now known as the Ukraine (at the time, he was born a Czech citizen). Until he was six years old, he lived a sheltered life with both of his parents, a brother and a sister. He was enrolled in Czech school at age 6 because there were no Hebrew schools in the area he lived. His father and other Hebrew town parents obtained a permit to open a Hebrew school where they lived. At school, he only spoke Hebrew, at home, he spoke Czech, and in town, he spoke Hungarian. Around the time he was twelve, he was accepted to the only Hebrew high school in the town of Mukacaevo, which was 20 miles away from his home.

His father worked as a watchmaker, optometrist, and jeweler. His family owned a department store in which Bill and his brother learned these trades and worked in the store after school and on weekends. One night, in 1938, while in high school, the Hungarian government overtook his hometown: he went to sleep a Czech and woke up a Hungarian. The Hungarian government, strongly influenced by Nazi power, withdrew credit of the Hebrew high school Bill attended. By age 13, he no longer went to school. Without completing his education, Bill began to apprentice his father in the clock making trade until age 17.

On March 18th, 1944, Germany occupied Hungary, and many Jewish escapees came to live in Berehovo. When Hungary fell to the Germans, many Hungarians took out their frustration on their new Jewish neighbors. The local police did not provide any support. Bill and his friends joined the Zionist Movement, giving them a sense of pride and identity in such a turbulent time. "Rumbles" between local Zionists and anti-Semite teenage boys occurred frequently due to the torment the Jewish children were experiencing from the anti-Semites. Word got around that if any Jewish boy was assaulted at any school, there would be a rumble. These rumbles took place almost every other Friday. Though he would often come home bloody, Bill could not help but feel satisfaction for standing up for his family and his faith. Fearing for his safety, Bill's parents decided it would be best for him to move to another town where his brother lived 100 miles away called Miskolc. No one would know Bill as a "rumbler" there. He did not know that the day he left Berehovo, the only home he had ever known, would also be the last time he would see his parents and fellow townspeople.

In Miskolc, Bill started his life anew. His older brother got him a job as a watchmaker, as well as lodgings with a local family. As of April 6, 1944, all Jews six years old and older were

required to wear a yellow star on their outer garments above their chests to show that they were Jewish. On his first day with the yellow star, many people with whom he had eaten lunch everyday were surprised to learn he was Jewish. A local order was passed that all Jewish-owned stores had to be closed down by April 25th. Jewish shopowners had to provide a list of their inventory and a key to their establishment to City Hall before the end of the day. Prior to the deadline, Bill's boss had asked him to hide some of their merchandise with the boss's friend so it would not be seized by the government. Bill would remove his star and carry the merchandise in a suitcase. On his third delivery, he was stopped on the street by a man he recognized from where he ate lunch everyday. The man was a member of the secret police, and asked him why he was not wearing his star. He made Bill open the suitcase, which was full of silverware. Bill was arrested and taken into custody. A week after he was taken to jail, his town was transformed into a ghetto. He awoke in the middle of the night to the sound of explosions and learned that his region was at war. In the early morning, not long after the start of the conflict, all the Jewish prisoners were woken up and marched to the train station. All prisoners wearing the yellow star were transported to a big prison in Budapest.

Gujto Foghaz, the biggest prison in Hungary, had six wings – one reserved solely for Jewish convicts. These individuals were sent from their hometown facilities to this prison because their municipality wanted to call themselves *judenrein,* or "free of Jews." Bill remained at the prison for six months. On October 18th, Bill and other local prisoners from Miskolc were summoned by the warden, who told them their town had fallen to the Russians. Since Bill and his counterparts were awaiting trial (and therefore, had not been convicted of any crime), they were "set free." Under normal circumstances, Bill and the others would have been returned to Miskolc, but the town would no longer take them, so they were turned over to the local vagrancy authority for deportation. The vagrancy authority handed them over to the Nazis, so they could be placed in a concentration camp.

At the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp, prisoners were lined up and inspected every morning. If they were not fit for work, they were sent to be gassed. The prisoners were weak and unstable, as the conditions were inhumane. Bill, skilled in the trades, was valuable to Nazi officials. Bill remained alive because he was assigned to the garment repair section for purposes of repairing sewing machines. He was surrounded by *muselmann*, prisoners that were so apathetic and emaciated that they looked like zombies. While in the camp, he spoke to no one, even individuals that he had previously known in his regular life. Bill was numb for most of this time, but work kept him sane.

On April 5, 1945, the prison was liberated by American soldiers. Although the prisoners did not speak English, it did not take long for them to discover what was happening. All of the Jews we transported to the displaced persons camp in Linz, Austria, under the protection of the United Nations. There, they were disinfected, undressed, examined, counted, and assigned to a barrack.. At the D.P. camp (as Bill refers to it), Bill was reunited with his sister and two cousins. All displaced people were allowed to select the country to which they would like to apply for residency. Bill and his sister had an uncle living in the United States, which made it possible for them to move to Boston.

Bill's story made the events of the Holocaust real. Hearing recited facts in about history never allowed us to grasp the scope of the atrocities individuals suffered in the Holocaust. His story brought us a step closer to understanding the significance of how the Holocaust affected the people who experienced it. He described the way he felt throughout the whole experience as numb, and it changed him into a person he still is today. Bill explained to us how his experience isolated him socially from the rest of society. Bill has learned to accept the facts of *his* life, and knows that he will have to live with them forever. Today, Bill lives alone in San Mateo, California and enjoys the benefits of being a veteran of the Korean War. He has many grandchildren.

We are both very grateful to have had the opportunity to interview Bill. He is a great example of how someone can see the worst in humanity and still be able to live each day with a smile.

Miriam Shlomo

By Georgialeen Hart, Translated by Ioana Ioanovich

"Six million people were burned in Auschwitz and other camps around Europe and nothing can bring them back," said Miriam Shomlo. These words have resonated in my mind ever since the interview ended. It is true that the stories we read about the Holocaust will never bring back those who we have lost, but the knowledge we gain from those around us can still change the world. This is Miriam Shomlo's story. On a rainy, cold February afternoon, she graciously told me about her experience growing-up in Romania before, during and after the Holocaust.

Her Romanian accent is thick as the translator asks her my questions in Romanian. The room, the translator and me bear witness to the life-changing events that Miriam is about to tell. Born on June 30, 1925 to a Hungarian father and a Romanian mother, Miriam Marioara Scharfer Shomlo is the woman who sat before me in her living room in South San Francisco, CA. Growing up in Beius in Bihor County, Romania, Miriam claims to have lived a privileged life. Her father was a pharmacist and the breadwinner for the family, while her mother worked alongside her father as the translator for their Romanian customers. They lived in a six-bedroom house with servants and maids. Having only heard of the German occupation through their radio set, the Scharfers did not realize the extremity of the situation until the day the Nazis arrived.

Upon coming back from one of their bi-yearly piano recitals in Arada, the Scharfer family returned home to find that their house was turned into a refugee camp. Her father's business closed on March 11, 1942. Miriam and her family's lifestyle changed dramatically and irreversibly on that day in 1942. The family moved into the storage house in their backyard and slept on its cold concrete floor. Miriam and her sister were expelled from school and forced to wear the Star of David. They were instructed to suspend their education and spent the rest of their days in the storage room.

In July of 1942, the family was told to leave their storage home and transport themselves by train to Ginta. They had twenty-four hours notice to vacate the premises. From their comfortable home in Beius, Romania, the home in Ginta, Romania was completely different. Ginta was a village and they lived in an assigned house with an owner. Their owner was a Hungarian man. They crammed themselves into one bedroom. Her father had to take money out of his savings to build a toilet outside. They used gas lamps to light their way.

Unable to work or get an education because of German control, her parents spent their days in the house. They were not able to work or better educate themselves because of Romanian and German laws against Jewish people. This situation proved to be difficult for her parents. Because Jews were not allowed to go to school, Miriam and her sister had little to do besides stay at home. "Living without a purpose drove us crazy," Miriam explained. Because Miriam and her sister were young, they did not yet understand the extent of their experience. She remembers enjoying the snow and swimming with other children in the Ghetto. None of the children were allowed to go to school or leave the area. She talks about vividly remembering how every night they filled their backpacks with clothes and food in case they were forced to

leave. Their parents told them to meet next to the river. Other Jewish families living in the Ginta Ghetto also told their kids to meet at the river in case the Nazis decided to evacuate the Ghetto. From the river, they could run into the forest and hide.

Since Jews were not allowed to own radios and the newspapers covered little, if any information on WWII, Miriam's family did not receive news about the importance of August 23, 1944. This day proved to be an important day for Romanian Jews. On August 23, 1944, not long after Russia invaded Romania, the Romanian government was overthrown and Romania joined the Allies. Despite the good news, the Hungarian owner said they should not celebrate because the Germans were still powerful. But in 1944, Miriam's family was freed and allowed to leave the Ginta Ghetto.

After their release, her father gained back possession of the pharmacy and after some time they moved to Arada, Romania, where her father opened a new pharmacy and tried to rebuild their lives. Her sister planned to become a pharmacist, but because of education restrictions that were still in place against Jews, she could not pursue her education and run the family business. The beginning of the Romanian Revolution also proved to be a difficult period for Miriam and her family. Her father's pharmacy was not a privately owned company, and as a result, he lost his business at the beginning of the Revolution. He soon got sick and her parents had become poor as a result of losing his business. Miriam worked odd jobs to help her family. She took a job as a typist to subsidize her family's income. While in Romania, she married twice and had a son.

When her son was older, he accepted a job in the United States. Since she was unable to leave Romania due to government restrictions, Miriam and her sister escaped to Israel. Miriam lived in Israel with her sister while she awaited news from her son. When her son became a United States citizen in 1995, Miriam moved to the United States and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area ever since.

She may not have a number, but she has a story. Before my interview, I attempted to Google Ms. Miriam Shomlo to find out information about her life. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any information. That is why telling Miriam's story is even more important. She believes that "she's lucky and she knows it" and that she did not truly suffer in the way that other European Jews did during the Holocaust. She is disappointed that she could not continue her education and was scared that Hitler might occupy the world, but still enjoys her life. She remained humble throughout the interview, joked with the translator and gave us chocolates. Her life was forever changed by her experience during the Holocaust but she survives to tell her story to a younger generation like me.

Assemblymember Jared Huffman
District 6

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Roma Barnes — *Interviewed by Brittany Blum*
Isaac Nittenberg — *Interviewed by Donna Budman*

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Roma Barnes

By Brittany Blum

Gasping For Air

"No Jews have lived here! Never!" The door slammed shut, once again barring Roma Barnes from the sanctuary of her home. She stared at the front side of that door she knew so well, the side reserved for strangers, while the inhabitants huddled restlessly within.

Roma had not always been a stranger to this home, and as she continued to stare at the curvature of each familiar crack running down the smooth wood, she tried to remember a time that she had been welcome in her own home. She felt a pressure on her arm, and allowed it to lead her down the steps and away from the rejection that had plagued her so frequently.

She stumbled down the street of Obitza Bancova in a confused blur of memory infused with reality. She could hear the sound of gunshots and the screams of agony, which pierced her soul. The noise made it difficult to distinguish the sound of her mother's urgent and frantic pleas for her to flee from the soothing words of her own daughter, leading her purposefully away from the destruction and hatred that had embodied her bloody history.

Roma and her daughter walked past an old decrepit building, and immediately her ears were bombarded with the sounds of crying, begging, and rapid prayers, spoken in low tones, beneath the breath of desperate prisoners. Roma and her daughter filed into the house of prayer, where they had always felt so secure and safe. She saw the bodies strewn across the bema, on railings, and stacked in piles. The pressure on her arm intensified as she was rushed forward. Her daughter came back into focus. She was determined to leave this all behind them and to return to the world that now welcomed the two women. But when Roma tried to speak, the only sounds she could hear were those tearful and choked pleas from her father on that day so very long ago: "Run, Roma, run!"

"Run, Roma, run!" The year was 1939. The place was Demblin, Poland. Roma Rosenman was nine and a half years old. The gunshots reverberated off the sides of buildings as the planes soared over head, one after another, leaving a trail of blood in their wake. Consumed by the horrors all around her, Roma barely noticed a blanket being thrown into her arms by her mother. Her brother, Shmuel, screaming with fear and confusion, clung to their mother and refused to leave her side. "Get out of here, Roma. Run!" She ran.

The German planes continued to shower the streets with bullets, leaving dead bodies in the streets. Roma's feet treaded on the small hairs layering the earth, hairs sheared off sacred beards full of traditions and histories. Roma flew down the road toward the woods. She tried to secure her hair with fabric so as to hide her identity. She ran with her friend, neither of them speaking. They put every ounce of their nine-year-old strength into their survival. They needed to get to the forest before it was too late. Their choked sobs didn't slow them as they were forced to turn a blind eye to the bodies they tripped over. The gunshots did not stop penetrating the air. Roma noticed that her own strained breaths were hers alone. She turned to see her friend

unmoving, a puddle of blood slowly enveloping her. Roma could not stop. Bullets seemed to just miss her as she ran through the trees.

Six days later, when her feet could carry her no further and the sound of the gunshots had long since faded into the horizon, Roma collapsed next to an outhouse. The cold that had been unnoticeable in her frantic flee had caught up to her, and she felt her limbs screaming for warmth. “Don’t move, or I’ll bring the soldiers here, little girl,” uttered a voice from behind the outhouse. A man, dressed in rags, appeared. He had a terrifying smile stretched across his face.

“Give me your blanket, and I won’t tell the Germans that you are hiding, Jew!” Unable to think of another possible course of action, Roma extended the blanket to the beggar, who quickly laughed and ran off into the darkness of the surrounding trees. Roma curled up on the ground and tried to stop the shaking of her hands. She silently drifted off to a lonesome and dreamless sleep, knowing deep within that she would never return to the life she had known. Nothing would ever be the same.

She was abruptly shaken awake. She didn’t know if she had slept for a moment or for days. She opened her eyes to see the figure of her uncle hovering above her. He helped her up and brought her, in his arms, back to Demblin, where his family had survived. He informed her that after she had left, the community had been forced into the synagogue at gunpoint. Those who weren’t killed had been taken to work camps. Her mother, father, and brother were not killed in the synagogue. They had been chosen to work. Roma felt a wave of relief wash over her. She was finally able to appreciate the faces that, she now noticed, were staring at her intently. To her right were her good friends and cousins: Moinec, who was her same age; Sesha, who was slightly younger; and Edick.

Her uncle explained that they had secured Polish papers and that that very night Sesha and Moinec were to be hidden. He then informed her that he was working on a plan to ensure the safety of the rest of the family and that it would work as soon as he put in place the right paperwork. Roma watched a few hours later as the two young cousins and their mother were taken away to safety. She was again forced to wonder if any of them would survive to greet each other again. Weeks past, and eventually Roma began to understand her uncle’s plan to secure a safe passage to Sweden for the family. He had put together a passport for himself, Moinec, and Roma, and they were ready to leave the constant state of fear for a real childhood, a true existence.

However, someone—Roma never discovered who—alerted the SS to the secret passports, and Roma’s uncle was quickly shot in broad daylight and left in the streets. Soon after, the family heard the sounds of an approaching roundup. The older prisoners were pushed into a line and herded onto trains. Roma did what she had been instructed to do so many times by her mother: once again, she fled her family. She ran for five days, the clear and disturbing details of the last roundup plaguing her consciousness and propelling her forward. After the fifth day, she returned to her home. She prayed every moment for the safe return of her remaining family.

Upon her arrival, Roma was faced with an environment different from the familiar streets on which she had grown up. This place was surrounded by barbed-wire fences. There were

vicious, barking dogs, the horrible sounds of destruction and captivity. Roma had walked straight into the newest Jewish ghetto.

Horrified at finding herself so close to the danger she had avoided for so long, she turned to run back the way she had arrived. At that very moment, two SS soldiers turned the corner and stood directly in front of her. Their chatter subsided as they focused their full attention on the prey that had crossed their path. They walked right up to the horrified and speechless Roma, who stood remembering the bodies strewn on the ground and the blood that flowed so freely in the gutters of her home.

One of the men walked up to her and stuck his large rifle to the side of Roma's head. "What are you doing here?" he demanded in German, with a voice thickly drenched in hatred and suspicion. Roma did not understand him, since she had never taken German in school. They repeated their question in Polish, and Roma answered with the most confidence she could muster. She said that she was "just tending to the chickens and the geese." She was able to speak Polish without an accent. This, above all else, proved to be her saving grace. She then stumbled away from the officers and grabbed a stick lying by the side of the road. She felt the weight of the object in her bare hands and looked up to see her family standing on the other side of the barbed-wire fence, their horror and desperation etched intricately into each line of worry. They met her eyes. There was a pleading desire to help the small child. Yet they know that they had no option but to pray, watch, and wait.

Roma moved away from the soldiers, slowly, and sat down near the ducks, using her sticks to poke at them, as if she were having the best time imaginable. Every nerve in her body was screaming for her to run to get out before that gunshot erupted and her life ended. But something deep within grounded her and kept her sitting there, laughing at the birds at her feet. The soldiers slowly began to move away down the street, turning back every so often to check on the peculiar little girl they had miraculously just allowed to live. Once the soldiers had left, Roma was able to sneak through the fencing around the ghetto to meet her family.

As time passed, Roma was put to work in the fields within the ghetto's parameters. She would do basic gardening, planting, and pulling weeds. She was constantly hungry. Food was scarce, if at all available. She lived this way for more than two years, battling with the constant fear of deportation, murder, and starvation. She worked tirelessly to ensure her safety as well as the safety of all the family she had left: her aunts, uncles, and cousins who had also been placed in the working ghetto. She would notice, day by day, that there were fewer and fewer elderly and sick. Eventually, all who were left were the youngest and strongest, the ones the SS thought could contribute to the work. Otherwise, people would disappear. Roma was utterly alone. Her distant relatives were prisoners as well, but she was forced to become a completely independent child, stealing her meals, working alone, and even protecting herself from physical and sexual attacks.

After two years in the prison of the city, the people of Demblin once again heard the horrible sounds that indicated another roundup. Roma, as before, saw the opportunity to escape and attempt to survive. However, she was just too tired of running. She was loaded onto the car and watched as multitudes of people fell to their deaths from dehydration, starvation, and

asphyxiation. She sat up close to a little window on the car and watched as the greenery swept past, day after day. She would sit and try to convince herself that once they got out, she would be put to work in a better place and would finally experience the forgotten taste of freedom.

She arrived in Czetsakovah, a concentration labor camp, five days later. The now 12-year-old Roma was placed to work in the ammunitions factory during the full 14-hour night shift. She made the casings on bullets. Children were being murdered by the masses solely because the soldiers felt that they represented new life. She would sit and pray as her friends were brutally killed, but somehow, once again, Roma was able to press on and survive. One morning, she sat in her barracks and heard that the dreaded cattle trains had returned. The Germans herded the prisoners into a large room. All assumed they would be murdered. And it was at this very moment, May 1945, when they sat there staring into the faces of their murderers, that the sounds of the gates falling reverberated throughout the camp. Freedom had come at last.

The Russians told the men, women, and children that they were free to leave and go home. Immediately Roma, her cousins, and her aunt began the walk, completely barefoot, back to their home in Demblin, hoping that they would find family, safety, and security. They arrived at their home two weeks later, only to find no one there. Roma went with her cousin, Sesha, into an orphanage, where her other cousin, Moinec, found them. He urged his sister to leave Roma behind and escape on the Kindertransport to Czechoslovakia. But Sesha refused to leave Roma. The three children found the train together and allowed it to whisk them to London, away from the awful, surreal reality of their past, They tried to block out the entirety of their childhood.

It was hard for Roma to handle her freedom. She had grown up knowing nothing but the chains of slavery. It was not easy to drop her shackles. She was suspicious of many and wondered whether she would ever be able to find a normal existence, or whether she would drift aimlessly through the rest of her life, flighty and unsure, never allowing herself to commit.

A few years into her stay in London, however, she was taken to a Passover seder at the home of an Orthodox rabbi and his seven children. She sat there engrossed in this poor man's charity and generosity. It perplexed her how someone with so little could be so very genuinely happy. This man, she would always remember, began to restore her faith in humanity. This holiday, this day representing rebirth and renewal, proved to be Roma's chance to begin again, to take the plunge and reopen her eyes to the opportunities and beauty the world could provide. The strength that had propelled her through such unspeakable disasters now was rekindled with a new determination and passion to rebuild, to move on, and to never forget.

Roma now lives in Tiburon, California, with her two children and grandchildren. She appreciates each day and loves the life she now lives. She has one powerful and simple message to the world. She begs others to appreciate life in the way that she has been able to. She tells her story for her people, so that they know a young girl named Roma Barnes was able to survive. She survived to share the hope and bravery that enabled her to discover beauty and kindness once again.

Isaac Nittenberg

By Donna Budman

When Science Fails

It was in 1944 that Isaac Nittenberg found himself on a freight train to Auschwitz. Crammed into a massive vehicle, he was treated like cattle. This would serve as a metaphor over the next several years of his life, and one of the many aspects of his Holocaust experiences that remain unfathomable.

It is a universal truth that the Holocaust was an incredible catastrophe, marring human history permanently. It is said to have been caused, in part, by Germany's dire economic situation. It is acknowledged to have been a product of a dramatic drop in morale among the German people. But what does this really mean? Do these statements provide satisfactory, or at least palatable, answers? No, they don't, because the questions still persist: Why? How? Are people really capable of this? Still, in an effort to understand this tragedy better, we approach it with as much of a scientific perspective as we can muster.

Isaac's story is part of this effort to contribute evidence toward this "scientific" endeavor. His unique personal history is one of our many attempts to begin to understand the catastrophe in the only way we know how: scientifically, empirically, objectively.

In 1944, Isaac's transport was destined for Auschwitz. He—along with his mother, Dora his father, Phillip, and his sister, Rachel—had managed to stay in the Lodz Ghetto until the last transport. The town of Lodz had been Isaac's only home, a textile town with an active Jewish community that had flourished over centuries, only to be ghettoized by the Nazis.

Exactly 70 hours later, Isaac and his fellow transports were released from the freight train and herded out to be sorted and separated, again, like cattle. The weak were filtered out, among them Isaac's entire family. This is the only time that Isaac recalls openly weeping. His father implored Isaac at that moment "to be strong." It is Isaac's final memory of his father.

The new arrivals were sorted into two groups with meticulous care. Isaac's group received real showers, while the other group was not so fortunate. They became victims of one of the Nazis' many cruel tactics for extermination. While Isaac dressed and dried off, he was crudely told his family's fate. Fellow men from Lodz told him not to be sad, that "his family [was] in heaven now." This left Isaac totally alone.

Isaac spent several months in Auschwitz, where he, along with the remainder of the final Lodz transport, were kept in a gypsy camp. His days were filled with monotonous marching that left him where he had started each time. His sentence in this camp was made remarkable only by an accidental run-in with his Uncle Leon, with whom he didn't even have a chance to speak.

In October 1944, Isaac was taken to Kaufbeuren, another concentration camp, along with 750 others from Auschwitz. Isaac recalls being able to survive its harsh conditions only because

he was assigned necessary work: to carry and bury dead bodies. Like nearly every other minor blessing granted him during the Holocaust, it was unclear whether it was more blessing or burden.

Isaac eventually came to work on the outside for the Berliner Building Company, where, if a prisoner were ever to fall out of line, even to relieve himself, he was immediately shot. And although these conditions made each day difficult, Isaac recalls dreading Sundays most, as every Sunday the Germans would spend their day of rest chasing, beating, and killing their Jewish prisoners. The constant beatings, murders, and unsanitary conditions contributed to the death of most of Isaac's transport. When they left for Dachau, only 100 of 750 prisoners remained.

In January 1945, Isaac was sent to Dachau, where he had a brief stay in quarantine. Next, Isaac was sent to Augsburg, from Augsburg to Burgau, and from Burgau to Turkhim. Each sentence was marked by terrifying routine and monotony. He arrived at each camp just months or weeks before liquidation. However, his sudden arrival at Turkhim must have been his greatest blessing during the Holocaust. Turkhim was, quite simply, the most sanitary, well-stocked, and humane of all of the Nazi camps. Under this camp's Commander Hoffman, Isaac received his first full meals of several years and was reminded that kindness and compassion still existed.

Toward the end of 1945, Commander Hoffman gave Isaac an implicit go-ahead, an opportunity to escape the endless cycle of concentration camps. One day, armed with a change of clothes supplied by a Hungarian kitchen aide, Isaac ventured to the camp's outskirts to collect water and never returned. He escaped, fleeing madness and chaos. He hoped to walk the entire way to Switzerland, where he would be free. Instead, exhausted, Isaac stopped his trek in Memmingen, Germany, where he spent several years recuperating.

After having survived the ghetto, numerous concentration camps, the loss of his family, the loss of his innocent faith in mankind's unshakable good, his direct experience with the Holocaust ended. Although he would endure his anti-Semitism in the future, his suffering directly from Hitler's Third Reich was over, and he would be responsible for piecing his life together once again.

It is absolutely inarguable that Isaac's story is unique, characterized by personal strength, character, endurance, and perseverance. It is a tribute to mankind's ability to live through nearly anything, and we are happy to make this contribution to the archives of Holocaust history. It is an attempt, admittedly rather weak, to collect data and to understand.

Isaac himself has tried to understand his history, conducting numerous interviews and taking multiple notes to ensure that it remains as accurate as possible. In the course of this project, I myself have tried to separate the emotional from the factual in an effort to understand. In addition to coming up short, I have come to realize that the Nazis used science, too. They used science to pervert and confuse reality, and so, the scientific method doesn't seem so appropriate anymore.

Although Isaac has selflessly committed himself to understanding, it seems that he, too, is at a loss to answer the persistent echoes of why and how. And so, at least for myself, I must

come to the conclusion that this is an event that defies science and understanding. It is an example of how human nature's natural inclinations toward kindness, benevolence, and good can be distorted, and then exploited. It is a "human stain" that can never be washed away. Our only duty is to stretch mankind's memory so that this event is never forgotten and to push the limits of comprehension so that it is never repeated.

Assemblymember Dave Jones
District 9

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

Bernard Marks

Interviewed by Amanda Citrenbaum and Hannah "Jo" Kasler

Acknowledgements

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Bernard Marks

By Amanda Citrenbaum and Hannah "Jo" Kasler

A Lost Childhood

Sixty-three years after he was supposed to become a Bar Mitzvah, Ber Makowski, now known as Bernie Marks, finally achieved his lifelong goal. On September 20, 2008, he became a Bar Mitzvah.

Bernard (Bernie) Marks was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1932. Bernie had begun his Jewish education at about the age of two. Both of his grandfathers had been orthodox rabbis and he was raised orthodox. His birthplace, Lodz, was an industrial city known for its textile, clothing manufacturing and film industries. Both of Bernie's parents were in the clothing manufacturing business. The population of Lodz at the beginning of World War II was approximately 660,000, of which about 220,000 were Jews.

On September 8, 1939, Bernie's life was changed forever; Lodz was invaded by Germany. Jews were forced to vacate their homes and were sent to the ghetto area called Baluty, a slum area of the city, where they were caged like animals behind barbed wire. To distance Jews even further, they were forced to wear a bright yellow Star of David on their clothing. In addition to Jews, there was a camp for Christian orphans and a special enclosed camp for gypsies.

Bernie said his life had not changed much when he and his family were first sent to the ghetto. He even had his bike and played with the other children. He lived in a modern, comfortable apartment with only his family of four. However, that period of relative normality soon ceased. Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend school and leisure activities were no longer permitted.

Bernie was able to work as a cloth cutter because his father registered his birth year as 1927 with the Gestapo, therefore making him five years older; a bend in the truth that ultimately saved his life. Bernie and his parents, like most of those employed, were issued ration cards for food since they worked in the factories that produced goods for the German government. However, they were allotted only 600-700 calories a day. Before long, the comfortable apartment soon overflowed as more people were brought into the ghetto. Shortly before the ghetto was liquidated and his family was transported in August 1944, there were forty-seven people living in the two bedroom apartment. When questioned about how he liked these living conditions, he simply said "I was not a happy camper," and adding to emphasize how cramped the apartment was, "there had been two brothers who slept in the same bathtub."

Bernie vividly remembers August 14, 1944, the day he and his family were evacuated, but in reality were sent in cattle cars out of the ghetto and transported to Auschwitz. Upon their arrival, Bernie and his father Joseph were separated from his mother Leah and younger brother Abraham. He never saw them again.

Because Bernie's father had the foresight to change Bernie's age, he and his father were transported, again by cattle cars, to the Dachau concentration camp instead of a death camp. Bernie remembers the journey from Auschwitz well, lasting three days and nights without any food or water. He and his father were then sent to sub camp #4 of Dachau. Daily they were marched approximately six miles, regardless of weather conditions, to Igling where the bunker was being constructed. They worked side by side in the gravel pits to build an underground factory for future production of Nazi Messerschmidt Me262 fighter jets. They were given very small amounts of food and many people became sick and died from starvation. They survived on 500 calories a day, consisting of a watery bowl of soup and a thin slice of bread. The daily ration was received upon their return to the camp at the end of the day. Every night, Bernie wondered whether he would live to see the next day or be sent to die. Eventually Bernie was transferred to the SS kitchen where he was able to steal food and smuggle it to the camp, where he shared with his fellow Jews.

In April 1945, Bernie realized something was changing. He saw planes flying overhead that were not Nazi planes; they were in fact, allied planes.

On April 25, 1945, the majority of the slave laborers were led on a "death march" back to Dachau. Those who were too weak for the march were once again loaded into cattle cars for transport back to Dachau. This time the cattle car doors were left wide open. The transport was stopped and many of the slave laborers tried to escape but were shot by the Nazi officers who were waiting in the woods. Bernie and his father, although wounded, managed to hide and spent the night in the woods. The next day, Bernie, his father and other slave laborers who survived the Nazi attack were collected and taken back to Hurlach Camp #4, a camp for the sick.

On April 27, 1945, a day Bernie described as "pandemonium", the United States military liberated the camp. However, Hurlach was reclosed because it was full of sick and dying Jews and the U. S. military did not want the disease to spread. Consequently, many people died even after the camp was "liberated." Earlier in the month of April, Bernie himself had contracted typhoid fever. Again, he credits his father for saving his life because his father was permitted to visit him each evening and brought him hot water.

After Bernie recuperated, he and his father moved to Landsberg, Germany where Bernie restarted his education where he left off before the war began.

Bernie came to America in 1947. He attended college and eventually settled in Sacramento. He and his wife Eleanor joined Congregation B'nai Israel and raised two daughters. He enjoyed a long career as a senior engineer, eventually retiring from Aerojet General.

On September 20, 2008, Bernie achieved his lifelong goal and became a Bar Mitzvah, the Jewish coming of age ceremony that usually takes place when a child turns thirteen.

Today, Bernie continues to be involved with his synagogue, teaches genealogy, and speaks to school children all over the world at his own expense about his lost childhood and the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Assemblymember Dan Logue

District 3

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Bert Schapelhouman *Interviewed by Lauryn Baxley*

Bert Schapelhouman

By Lauryn Baxley

"It keeps going, just like I do," said 83-year-old Bert Schapelhouman, after trying to blow out a trick candle on his birthday cake. Schapelhouman is a Holocaust survivor, and has more love and passion than most have in a lifetime. After surviving World War II in a concentration camp and losing many of those who were close to him, his positive attitude on life proves extraordinary and refreshing. His strong sense of emotion and ability to carry on a conversation with even the shyest of students goes to show his openness and willingness to share his story. Although a raw pang of emotion is inevitable when talking about such events, his story is both heart wrenching and empowering.

Born and raised in Boyle, Friesland, North Holland, Schapelhouman, like most Dutch children, grew up on a dairy farm. Schapelhouman talks fondly of his family, his mother, father, brother and two sisters, and how they worked on the farm together - the strength of their relationships, and most importantly, the strong views they were taught in support of equality. Schapelhouman clearly remembers his father bringing the war to his and his siblings' attention by telling them that he thought the Germans had invaded Holland. He remembers a warm day in April of 1940 where his father reminded them that the Germans had come to take things, not to bring them anything, and that they did not stand for racist thoughts like hating Jewish people. Schapelhouman's family began hiding Jewish people in their home in 1942. Although these people were strangers to them, the family willingly risked their lives in order to help others. Being surrounded with such good morals had an obvious affect on the 16-year-old young adult. His memory is good for his age today. He talks about the various Jews who resided with their family, explaining that their house was a transit house to finding a safe place to stay. He talks about a smelly young boy, peeling enough tomatoes to leave grooves in his fingers, and the sharp memory of two young girls. When he remembers the two young girls with impressive manners and voices of angels who loved to sing for his mother, his voice starts to shake and he reveals the fate of the two innocent young girls. Both girls were caught and killed. Schapelhoumen's passion is deep, as his whole body seems to feel for all of mankind, even those he did not have the privilege to be close to.

Schapelhouman, whose eyes are still full of life, gathers himself and begins to talk about the underground resistance. He is proud of his and his neighbors' contributions, but has a sense of modesty surrounding him. They took small, violent actions that deterred the Germans' progress. Those listening to Mr. Schapelhouman are taken on a journey back to 1943, where Schapelhouman, along with friends from the resistance, loaded a train with bombs and set them off. They are forced to do this twice because of the Nazi soldiers checking the tracks. He tries to bring in his audience and help them feel the fear of the German men coming, a sense of unknowing and utter fear of what is to happen next. He is lucky to get away, and has the courage to finish off what he started. The bomb explodes and Schapelhouman goes permanently deaf in one ear. The true bravery of his actions comes from background knowledge: all young men who were 16 or older, if caught, were forced to work for the government. Schapelhouman was of age, yet managed to stay under the government's radar.

The Dutch were increasingly aware of the Nazi spies and did what they could to protect themselves. Most tried to stick together, while some took the knowledge of hidden Jews to authorities. In September of 1944, after Operation Marketgarden, many thought the war was over and raised flags in honor of what they thought was the beginning of peace. SS men moved in with force the next day. Bert Schapelhouman, along with his father, brother, two Jewish men and a British flyer were taken into custody at 2 am after waking up surrounded by SS men. His father was beat up on the scene and they were all thrown into dark cars. Schapelhouman was stuffed into the back seat of a car with an SS man and gun on each side. After this point, he lost a true sense of time. Taking with him the screams of his mother and his promise not to talk, he is moved to a jail house.

The first day in custody gave Schapelhouman a false reality of what he was to later endure. He was offered a cigarette and told to relax, and although he took the cigarette, he anxiously awaited for his interrogation. The second day, Schapelhouman was taken into a room to be interrogated by a Czech man, an SS officer and a Dutch officer. He remained loyal to his mother and did not speak. As a result, the fingernails of his right hand were pulled out. Day three, his loyalty to his mother causes the fingernails of his left hand to be removed by the officers, while days four and five involved the removal of toenails from both feet. By day six, all of his teeth were beat out of him. Day seven proved to be no better, and he was beat over and over. Through all of this he did not give in and remained loyal to his people. It became clearer to the audience that his emotions break away from him, when he is talking about cruelty done to others. When speaking of his own life, he bears a proud exterior of survival.

Schapelhouman lasted another month in jail in the depths of winter. After his time in jail, he was taken to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, and it is here that he experienced an unimaginable amount of cruelty. His ride there in a cattle car was filled with starvation and despair. His descriptions parallel Elie Wiesel's. Mauthausen is located on the Danube River, surrounded by mountains. Upon stepping out of the car, Schapelhouman recalls, "It was beautiful, all of the mountains, all of the sudden I forgot where I was for a second." Seconds later, he was forced to march through the gates into hell. An 11 year old boy died in front of him. While marching, dogs are biting at his feet and the frozen temperature felt like a slap in the face.

All of the men are taken inside and made to strip and shave. Schapelhouman remembers bleeding in the most private of places and apologizes to the women in the audience for painting an unpleasant picture. The truth is, he has no reason to apologize. He was given new clothes and a red triangle to label him as a political prisoner; he is held captive for being a hero.

Watered down soup is served with a piece of hard bread. SS men pour soup into bowls, knocking over bowls in the hands of prisoners and punishing them for spilling their soup. "They created all these monstrosities," said Schapelhouman.

While placed under the abused power of a gay cappo, Schapelhouman felt the man's eyes upon him and he ran from the room into the nearest location, a bathroom. He jumped into a bench with holes filled with excretion and suffocated himself until he could hold it no longer. He gasped for a breath. He hears a man enter the bathroom look around and leave; he is safe.

Schapelhouman gives a quiet chuckle when remembering the wretched smell that clung to his skin. Because water was so scarce he was left with the smell until it blew away on its own.

Schapelhouman is undoubtedly a great conversationalist and even better storyteller. He manages to stray off track, but this is what gives him his charm. Once back on subject, he remembers another SS man who looked like a model, a tall blonde man with a toned build and blue eyes. “Man,” he said, “he was a looker.” His face turns down after that, as he remembers the man walking into a room, shooting a prisoner, smiling to himself, and walking out of the room. He still has faith in mankind after all this.

In 1945, Schapelhouman was forced to work in a sub-camp tightening the screws on flying bombs. Although there was a Nazi guard for every five people, those who worked in the sub-camp had conceived a plan to leave the last screw only partially tightened. Over 70 percent landed in the ocean. Schapelhouman lets out a loud laugh after crediting himself and others to saving people from the bombs; he does this without any sense of conceit, he is just genuinely happy to have saved people from what he experienced. This same year, his father was released from a concentration camp and died because his body was too far gone to be nursed back to health. His father was only 53. He talks later about helping his mother pass the hard times.

There is no good time within the camp as life only worsened. Memories are tossed on to the table, each one with exceeding brutality. Christmas Eve beckoned one of Schapelhouman’s worst memories. A priest was going to baptize a young boy while the SS were at a Christmas party, but as he finished, a group of SS caught them, dragged their already sickly bodies into the below 27 degree weather and sprayed them with water to watch them freeze. Schapelhouman’s eyes well up with tears as he told this story as he had to walk past their dead, erect, frozen bodies every day for a week. He takes a minute to reflect on the horrendous behavior that really cannot be summed up with words.

Schapelhouman’s experiences in the concentration camp are far more than I can possibly explain. Not living through such harsh experiences, I cannot possibly understand the emotional trauma nor do justice to his story… only he can evoke the true emotions and give the real story. Bert was kind enough to share his story with a group of young strangers who had no idea how to respond. He was rescued in 1945 and could not fathom why the nurses where doing everything they could to save his life, when, during the previous months, everything was done to slowly kill him. He does not know whether he should keep reliving his story, so that all of us who have not lived through it can make sure it is not repeated or if he should stay quiet and escape the nightmares. Schapelhouman did not find peace quickly in his life - he experienced the death of his best friend, the death of his fiancée and the death of his father.

Mankind is good, Schapelhouman believes. A small god-like dove on his shoulder and the people surrounding him are what pushed him through such hard times. Even after seeing the worst of mankind, he still has faith that we as people can do the right thing and in a positive higher power.

Today he exceeds all odds, both in personality and in life. He says, “I have had a good life, aside from those few years. I love life, and I’d love to become 100.” He finds the beauty in

the world and tells of his love for traveling, art and his family. From a man who regrets nothing, a man who could have avoided hostile punishment if he shut the door, and a man who succeeds in all possible ways, he is a true hero. All who are graced to stand near him should consider themselves lucky - because they have been in the presence of greatness.

Assemblymember Bonnie Lowenthal

District 54

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Gerda Seifer *Interviewed by Anna Pearl*

Acknowledgements

Mary Lowen, Jewish Family and Children's Services of Long Beach

Gerda Seifer

By Anna Pearl

I Was Determined

I arrived at Gerda Seifer's home in Long Beach, California with certain expectations. I assumed the walls would be plastered with yellowing black and white photographs of her family lost in the Holocaust, that she would probably wear glasses and all black, and that her accent would sound something like my grandparents'. I thought because I am Jewish that we would have some sort of mutual understanding that stretched beyond words. I had already imagined the sort of encounter and experience that I was going to have that day, but for all my assumptions I could not project what sort of story I was about to hear.

I was met at the door by a spirited man, Dr. Seifer, Gerda's husband. He led me into the living room which was open and spacious; it had several big windows that let in the final rays of afternoon sunshine. Gerda came into the house and moved briskly with her walker to the living room. I looked to see if she had glasses; she had none. I noticed that she had lively blue eyes, blue eyes just like mine. She smiled, reassuring me. She had no strong accent and her clothes were not the black of perpetual mourning. She had just come in from speaking to a large class of middle school students about her experiences during the Holocaust. When I asked her what she wanted to gain from sharing her experience with me that day she simply explained to me that she gives many talks to students in different schools. She is passionate and open about sharing her story with others. In fact, before leaving she told me that if anyone needed a guest speaker at my school that I should call her. Gerda is determined. She was determined to survive, determined to become a nurse, and now is determined to share her story.

We sat in her living room sipping on water and chitchatting about the interview process and a few other details. She sat across from me in a high-backed wooden chair and I sat on the couch facing her.

"Shall I start?" Gerda asked.

"Well, yes of course."

Gerda was born in a small town in south-east Poland, Przemysl. She was the only child of a middle class family. Her father, Henryk Krebss, owned a successful fabric store on the main street of her town. Gerda's mother, Edyta, was a learned woman. She was an excellent homemaker, but also well read and spoke Latin and French. The life that Gerda knew was changed drastically in a matter of weeks. The first bombings in her town occurred on September 1st 1939. The Poles were defeated in just two weeks. Soon the Germans occupied her town, soon Gerda saw a group of young men lined up against a wall with their hands over their heads and German soldiers pointing guns at them with a plan to take them to an adjoining forest to be shot—maybe digging their graves first, Soon her father was hiding in an attic, and then just as suddenly the Russians came. The river San that ran through her town suddenly became the border between Germany and Russia. The Russians occupied her side of the river until June of

1941. Gerda's father had to hide for a time because he was considered an enemy of the Russian state. His assets were liquidated; everything from the fabric store was taken. The Krebs family moved to Lwow, the third largest city in Poland. The Russians were not exceptionally kind to the Polish people, but most people figured they were better than the Germans.

The Russians occupying Poland fled in 1941 and the German occupation began. The German forces were timely, organized, and efficient—even at murder. Everyone had to register and receive papers. Jews over the age of thirteen were made to wear an armband with a Star of David on it. All people in Poland were put on a rationing system and had to use ration coupons to get food. They enforced strict rules, one of which was that Jews were not allowed to be in public space, including schools, parks and public transportation. Gerda's parents needed to run an errand that required use of the streetcar. They asked Gerda if she would go on the streetcar to run the errand. Gerda excitedly said yes. Gerda had two advantages over many other Jewish people: she spoke perfect Polish and did not look Jewish. Gerda told me, "I had blue eyes, like yours. And a cute little round nose. I didn't look Jewish, like you don't look Jewish." Before going on this errand she left her armband and her papers at home. She had to be sure to look like a Catholic Pole. She was able to take the streetcar without a hitch, crossing herself as the car passed any church. She felt indestructible. She was fourteen and she had outsmarted the Germans. As she walked down the street, two German army police officers stopped her. Luckily, they hadn't seen her get off the streetcar. The two men had big black leather boots, the kind that forced one to imagine being kicked by them. They asked Gerda, in German, if she was Jewish. She said to them in perfect Polish, "I don't speak German." They asked her in broken Polish, are you Jewish.

She stops her narration to ask me what I would do. This is not a rhetorical question. She waits for me to answer. I become uncomfortable.

"I don't know, I guess I would just tell them I'm not Jewish."

"But you can't do that. You have no papers to prove it. You're a smart girl. Think, think." I think to myself, I would have died. They would have killed me right then and there. What would I say to two Nazi guards at fourteen if my life depended on it? Gerda was so cunning; she never seemed to stop thinking. I may have had an advantage like she had, blue eyes and a small nose, but I would have wasted my disguise in my indecision. I told her I honestly couldn't say. She sort of smiled and continued with her story. She told the guards that she wasn't quite thirteen yet and therefore wasn't obligated to wear the white armband with the blue Star of David on it. She told them she left her papers at home, a home which had already been looted by Russian soldiers. They told her they would come by the next day to check on her papers. In the meantime she asked a school teacher to write her a letter on school paper saying that she had lost her birth certificate but was under age thirteen. He wrote the letter, she still doesn't know if he did this out of kindness or ignorance. The Germans never came. Gerda said that you didn't simply have to be one step ahead of the Nazis, you had to be able to think like them. She knew that if she told them there was nothing to loot, they probably would not come.

Conditions worsened for Jews in Poland. In 1942 ghettos formed. The Germans brought Jews from outlying provinces to live in the Lwow ghetto. There were over 120,000 Jews living

in the ghetto in 1942 prior to the "Aktionen." They were walled in with barbed wire and broken glass on top. Germans and a large Ukrainian militia guarded the entrances and exits of the ghetto. Gerda's family lived in a greenhouse with eighteen other families. Gerda's father caught wind of the "Aktionen" and arranged places for his wife, nephew, and Gerda to hide. Polish people were also under strict surveillance by Germans; many of them were only willing to help Jewish people for large sums of money. Gerda hid in a Polish woman's cellar for six weeks. She said, "I was a good girl and so I waited." She knew what her father had given up for her to be there. She sat in the pitch black silence and her imagination wandered. She thought about skiing vacations with her mother, her old home, her mother's cooking, and school. She could not stop a recurring fantasy. She could see herself running through a green grassy field. She imagined her bare feet against the grass and the wind whipping her hair gently. These thoughts became maddening. The dampness and solitude and darkness was too much, she had to go outside to see the sun. It ceased to matter if she was caught and she walked onto the street. Luckily, the only person to see Gerda was the woman who was hiding her. She calmed Gerda down and she returned to the cellar.

She met with her father again in the ghetto; her mother was not there. Her father explained what happened: Gerda's cousin, Richard, was too frightened to be alone in hiding; he was scared and returned to the ghetto. Edyta refused to leave Richard's side and where she was supposed to hide could only take one person. So they stayed in the ghetto and Edyta and Richard were taken away. Gerda says her memory goes blank here; she remembers nothing more of the ghetto. Gerda discovered after the war that father also died because he was compelled to help others. Henryk rented a room outside the ghetto to wait out the final roundups. Some of the men heard about his plan and begged for him to save them. He could not deny them. He, like Gerda, did not look Jewish, so he would get the food for all the men in hiding. Someone recognized him in the town and turned him into the Germans. Before Henryk's death he arranged for Gerda to hide permanently. Gerda was to become another woman's child, taking the place of a dead child and use that birth certificate. She became Alice, a Catholic girl, who was treated as a slave by her new family. And it is with this family that she waited out the rest of the war.

Gerda was determined to get away from Poland and her new "family." Through the help of an old family friend she was able to get in touch with an English Rabbi who was taking Jewish orphans back to England. Gerda had family there to vouch for her and so she was allowed to immigrate. On the ship to England she was sick and miserable, but she stayed hopeful. Gerda realized that at eighteen she was an old woman in many respects; she had matured beyond her years. At the same time was unable to grow during the war. She had no friends, been on no dates, and not been to school in years. She said, "I was determined to make a new life for myself." She learned English in only one year. She entered training to become a nurse and lived in the dormitory there. She says here she was able to finally live out her teen years. Her only surviving cousin moved to America and in 1951 helped her to get an affidavit to move there. Her English nursing license was no good in the states. This could have been a devastating blow, but Gerda's determination would not allow her to waver and so she returned to nursing school in America. She worked in a hospital in New York where she met her husband, who was a resident at the time, in 1955. They came to California, intending to spend a year, and have been here ever since.

I asked Gerda if her grandchildren knew what happened to her. She said that they were too young to know all the details, but they knew she was a survivor. I looked at my watch and over two hours had passed. Gerda had guided me through her experience; she did not need any direction from me. She remains determined. She told me that she has shared this story many, many times. It seems that she will continue to share her story and her family will carry out her legacy. But, this was my first time listening and I marveled at the woman with blue eyes.

Assemblymember Fiona Ma
District 12

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Annie Glass	*Interviewed by Ida Cuttler*
Sheila Jurkiewicz	*Interviewed by Vilma Herrera*
Clara Weinberger	*Interviewed by Shelby Getsla*
Toni Wolf	*Interviewed by Sonia Bernick*

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Annie Glass

By Ida Cuttler

We Too Will Be Free

"Ouch, that hurts!" Annie remembers telling the woman who was tattooing her. "Be lucky I am doing this to you," was the SS woman's response.

I think of the cryptic nature of this woman's response. Lucky? I think, how can someone who has lost so much in such a short lifetime be lucky? And yet. here Annie sits in front of me with a home, a husband, children, and grandchildren. She lived through one of the most horrific events in human history, survived with two sisters, while others either did not make it at all or made it completely alone. Annie certainly hasn't been lucky. But she is the picture of resilience and what it means to overcome hardship.

I have enjoyed getting to know Annie Glass as the person she is now, and have appreciated hearing the story of how she became this person. Our interviews were a mixture of my timidly asking questions of her past and talking about her current life. I remember the time I asked her about her first impressions of entering Auschwitz, the notorious extermination camp where many Jews lost their lives. "There were no impressions of things, we were not asked of how we felt," Annie tells me. "We did what we were told to do and tried to live out another day. And another day." She described her registry into Auschwitz 60 – 70 years ago and shows the number tattooed onto her arm.

"I'm not a youngster," Annie Glass tells me as she smiles. Annie was born as Chana Glatt on June 15, 1924. I realize the similarities in the name "Glass" and "Glatt" and I embarrassingly wonder if I had been pronouncing her name wrong all this time. In fact, as it turns out, her husband's last name is Glass, and she took on his name after they got married. Just another one of the many coincidences in her life.

Annie was born in an industrial city in the middle of Poland. The town was formerly known as Wierzbnik, but now is called Starachowice. Her parents worked at a fabric store that they owned. Her family was observantly Jewish, especially her older brother. Her favorite holiday during childhood was Passover because her family had a big seder. Her parents used to make her take a nap during the day so she would not be tired for the evening's festivities. I realize that her daily life was not too dissimilar from my own childhood. My family also has large seders during Passover, and I always look forward to them. She attended public school until 3:00 pm and then came home for an hour before she went off to Hebrew school. At Hebrew school, she learned to write and read in Hebrew and to recite traditional prayers, such as the Kiddush. She describes the relationship of Polish Jews and Polish non-Jews in her town to be "not as bad as they were in other towns." She even had a girlfriend across the street who was not Jewish. They went to each other's houses on the weekends.

Annie was 15 years old when the Germans occupied her town on September 1, 1939. That is one year younger than I am, and I cannot even begin to imagine what that would be like

if, one day, everything I had ever known would be changed forever. Before the Germans invaded Starachowice, the Jewish people knew that something was about to happen, but they had difficulty distinguishing what was true from what was just a rumor. The Germans first dropped bombs before invading, and everyone thought that these bombs would be filled with gas. Annie remembers going into her parents' shop and crouching on the floor. Her mother gave her and her sisters silk to put over their mouths to protect themselves from the gas. However, no gas came.

Their community was consumed by fear, and many talked about leaving town. "Everyone at that time was running," Annie says. Her own family ran to a nearby town called Slupianova. Her father and brother left to go stay with her father's family. They were running in the night, and a German guard saw them. The guard told her brother to "halt!" but her brother, frightened and thinking only with the swiftness of his legs, kept running. "It was the first tragedy of our family." Annie said. The guard shot and killed her brother. He was the first in their town to die. When Annie's mother heard that her son was killed, she ran the four hours from where they were staying to where Annie's brother was. After burying him, the rest of the family returned to Starachowice.

The Jewish community in the town had to give over its valuables to the Nazis. Annie describes that all these valuables became "a mountain of things" in the center of the town. Her mother gave away some jewelry she got from her wedding. Some people tried to hide their valuables, while others, fearing for their lives, said goodbye to family heirlooms and added to the pile. Not long after that, the town's synagogue was burned down. Annie remembers that people did not even want to leave their houses to go look at the rubble. The grief of knowing this had occurred was enough.

Soon, Jews from other towns all over Poland were relocated to their town. At one point, Annie had 60 people living in her family's house. It was not the most convenient of living situations, but, as Annie notes, "You had to have compassion." A man who stayed at her house ended up being a fur seller from Lodz who had sold her sister a fur coat. As if overnight, Starachowice had become a ghetto. Their ghetto was different from others in Poland because it was not enclosed, and people could come and go as they pleased. Annie, however, could no longer go to school, and her parents could no longer work in their shop.

Annie remembers the last time they celebrated Passover in her house. "We tried to make it as nice as possible." They had lit candles, and her grandfather was saying Kiddush when someone knocked loudly on their door. "I'll never forget it," Annie said. "It was as if everyone froze." The German official on the other end of the door yelled at them to turn off their lights. They did, and Annie and her family were forced to end their seder.

In 1940, three labor camps were built outside their city: Zeork, Mayufka, and Tsernitza. Some Jews were sent to work and live in the factories, while others would be deported. To work in the factory, you had to have a note. A Polish, non-Jewish tailor told Annie's mother that he could get these notes for Annie and her sisters in exchange for fabric. "In the factory, there was a chance," Annie said. Deportation usually ended up in death.

Because the tailor was able to bribe a German official for work papers, Annie and her two younger sisters were sent to Mayufka. Her mother, however, was separated from them and went to Tsernitza, and her father ended up in Zeork. Annie describes her and her sisters as having "the best jobs in the camp." At first, she served soup to the people in the camp. Later, she sewed canvas covers for German cannons.

There were people in her camp who were planning to escape to the forest to join the partisans. They organized themselves and were going to take scissors from the factory to cut the fence and escape. These men wanted Annie to join them, but they did not want to take her two younger sisters along. But Annie refused to be separated from her sisters. That night, when the group tried to escape, all 60 were caught and killed. I cannot help thinking that Annie, too, would have been among the dead if she had not stayed behind with her sisters.

The next day, wagons came to the camp. Annie, her sisters, and everyone else in the camp were to be deported to Auschwitz. When Annie says 'Auschwitz,' my heart beats a little quicker and gets lodged in my throat because I'm afraid to hear of the suffering that is surely to come. June 1942: All of the Jews from the camp are packed into the wagons, 100 per car. Annie held her sisters close. "We were packed in like cattle," Annie said. Finally, the doors opened. After riding all this way without food or water, everyone was happy for this bit of fresh air. The gates reading "Arbeit Macht Frei" ("Work Brings Freedom") hung above them, and they marched through.

Everyone was forbidden from talking to one another, and no one knew exactly what was going on. Annie and her sisters had to take off all of their clothes. They sat completely naked on benches in a long corridor, waiting. Next, they were pushed into another room where there were clothes. Annie grabbed a black knit dress; little did she know she would be wearing this dress for a whole year.

They then got in line to be registered and tattooed with identification numbers on their arms. Annie remembers pleading with a woman who was shaving people's hair not to cut off her sisters' beautiful locks. They were marched to the barracks with small amounts of soap and bread.

In Auschwitz, Annie and her sisters watched out for each other as best they could. This was not always easy. One time, Annie's younger sister got sick and had to go stay in the little hospital in the camp. Annie, whose job was to collect wood from the forest, fashioned a broom out of twigs and sticks. She gave this broom to the Polish nurse in charge of all the sick girls in the building. She asked her to keep her sister safe from harm. That night Annie heard shooting and yelling from the little hospital where her sister was. "All of them were being taken out to death." She laid in her barrack with her other sister. Annie was torn between going to her sick sister and staying with the sister who was clutching her hand and begging her to stay. Annie decided to stay, but the whole night she worried for her other sister's safety. The next day, the first thing Annie wanted to do was find out if her sister had been taken away, but she had to go to work first. Finally, she got to the hospital. There were her sister and the Polish nurse. The nurse had hidden her under some towels and kept her safe.

Every day, coming back from work, Annie saw the chimneys filled with smoke from the crematoria. One time, there was a group of French girls in the camp. They were new arrivals. One of the girls spoke Yiddish and asked Annie where they were being taken. Annie turned away with tears in her eyes; she could not bring herself to tell the girls what was going to happen, for surely they were being sent to the gas chambers, to their death.

By January 1945, Russia had already begun pushing the German army back. Annie and the others in the camp felt that liberation could happen any day. However, on the 17th, Annie, her two sisters, and a large group of the women in her camp were marched out of Auschwitz. It was to be a death march in which they walked and walked through the harsh Polish winter. Annie only had a blanket with her. “They told us that they were protecting us from the Russians,” Annie said. “Can you believe that?” Annie left Auschwitz with a single piece of bread. She held her two sisters tightly. They stopped in places such as Ravensbruek, which was another concentration camp. At this camp, there were a lot of gypsy prisoners, as well as Jews. Many people died on the march. Their bodies fell into the river. I cannot even imagine the strength it must have taken just for Annie to keep her legs moving. Annie says that each day they walked with the hope that they would soon be liberated.

They stopped at what Annie describes as a “large outdoor theater area.” It was Passover, and someone had managed to get beets from a kitchen. They used these beets for the Passover tradition of dipping your finger in wine and reciting the plagues that God inflicted upon the Egyptians in order to liberate the Israelites. Annie got up in front of the group of people. These were people who had been enslaved themselves, much like the Israelites. “Our liberation day will come, too,” Annie said. “We, too, will be free.”

By the time it was May, Annie had been marched all the way from Auschwitz to Germany. Annie and a group of women—including her two sisters—spent the night in a barn in Shmallbach sleeping with the cows. Little did they know the next morning they would finally be liberated.

On May 8, 1945, a large tank rolled up to the place where Annie was sleeping. In the morning, everyone crept out from the barn to see what was going on. A Russian soldier called down from the tank, “What are you doing here?” Everyone responded: “We’re Jewish.” The soldier then said, “I’m Jewish, too.” All of the girls cried in excitement. They kissed the soldier and each other. “At that moment, we knew we were free,” Annie said. “He told us the war was going to be over that day.”

The days after liberation were not easy. Even though the war had ended, Annie still had to face many hardships. The first night after they were liberated, they stayed with a German farmer. There were 50 girls together in his one house. Annie could not believe that there was actual clean linen and a bed. She fondly recalls finding soap for the first time after so many years. Ironically, the meal that was served was pork. “Some were so hungry that they did eat it, but for me it was impossible.” Because they had not eaten a meal in so long, many of the women got sick after eating.

After that, Annie and her sisters returned to their hometown. They knocked on the door of their house, and a Polish woman who had been living there told her and her sisters to leave, or else the woman's brother would shoot Annie and her sisters. Feeling displaced, Annie and her sisters lived in many places around Poland, mostly with the group with whom they were liberated. Sometimes they had to sleep on the floor, "but we were used to that," Annie said.

The atmosphere in Poland was extremely hostile. In her town, a Polish man killed five Jews. This, of course, frightened Annie and the others, so they decided to go to Lodz, a bigger city in Poland. Here, they stayed with a former partisan member. There were many girls sleeping on the floor, and they stayed there for a night. The next day, they had to leave again. Annie and her sisters found a friend of her father's, also living in Lodz. To make money, she and her sisters sold handbags. The days when they were not able to sell any bags were those when they probably wouldn't eat. Annie still feared for her and her sisters' safety, as anti-Semitism and violence were pervasive throughout Lodz.

Somehow, Annie got connected with her cousin, who was staying in Bergen-Belsen, a former concentration camp that was converted after the war into a displaced persons camp. Annie sent her sisters on ahead before going to join them. On January 1, Annie got herself to the train station in Berlin, where she was going to meet her cousin. Coincidentally, it was Annie's future husband who helped her onto the train.

Annie and her husband, along with eight other couples, got married at Bergen-Belsen. They were given soda water and crackers as wedding gifts. A year or so later, her daughter was born. There were many other people in the town who Annie knew from Starachowice and the concentration camps. Many of them had lost their entire families. In 1948, Annie's younger sister, Miriam, went to live with their aunt in Israel. It was very hard for Annie to see her go alone, but because their aunt's place was so small, Annie and her other sister could not join her.

In 1951, Annie was sponsored to go to America. She did not know exactly where she was going, but she got aboard the ship and made the long journey, her husband and young daughter in tow. At first, they lived in Stockton, California. Later, her husband found a job in the Mission District of San Francisco, so they moved there. I asked her what it was like adjusting to the American lifestyle. She told me it was "no problem." She went to school at night to take English classes and studied hard. "I'm sure my English still is not very good," she said bashfully. I smile and remind her that her English is way better than my Yiddish will ever be.

When Annie rolled up her sleeves to show me the numbers on her arm I felt as though I was looking past them and into my own thoughts. I thought that by meeting her, maybe I could finally wrap my head around all of the facts and numbers and dates that I had been hearing about for so long. I thought that a face would make it all seem a little more real. But as I sat across from her, it still did not seem real to me. It does not seem real that 6 million people had to die simply because of their religion. It doesn't seem real that a sweet, compassionate person such as Annie had to suffer so much death and loss in her lifetime. And then I thought about it again. It is real. It happened. It was one of the most terrifying events in human history.

But what is even more powerful than the gruesome numbers and facts of history put together is that the woman sitting in front of me is here and is opening up her story to me—a story that is as much about perseverance and strength as it is about loss and sadness. It is real that I can relate to her, despite our different pasts. The reality is that my generation needs to carry Annie's story and the stories of so many others like her onward. The people of the next generation and the generation after that will not forget these stories and these realities…because we can never let something like what Annie went through happen again.

Sheila Jurkiewicz

By Vilma Herrera

Pictures from the Past

I sit at the long table covered with a white mantle. The chair exceeds my height. The armrest elongates my arms. My toes touch the white, short-haired carpet that lines the whole floor.

"You poor girl! It's so cold outside! Would you like some tea? How about some potato cakes?" asks Sheila. With this, I feel more at ease. I ask her a question, and she responds with the story of her life. "Do you have pictures?" I ask. She walks into the living room and picks out the only two pictures she was able to save during the war. The pictures are mostly gray, with black and white features, making it clearer to see. The first picture has two men dressed in Polish army suits, but their posture and poise speak of sophistication, pride, and eloquence. The other photo is of Sheila's two brothers and three sisters. It has an orange-gray tint. Both photos look smooth enough to caress with my fingers. Sheila Jurkewitz tells me that she had last seen them the day she left the ghetto.

The day she left the Wilno Ghetto was a day of sorrow. She was overcome with loneliness. She gathered with about 500 other young Jewish girls from the ghetto. German guards selected young women and told them they were going to be sent out. Sheila didn't know where she was going or if she would ever come back and see her family: "The big, long gates opened up, and we dragged our feet over the mud. You could hear the siren that meant the gate was opening. You could hear the dogs barking." The day seemed gray and cold for Sheila. Her brothers and sisters were being left behind with no mother and father. All of the women boarded the cargo trains in ragged clothing, with bowed heads, and a sluggish walk. Sheila got on the back of the cargo train, not knowing that it would be the first trip to one of five labor camps. She worked Valvari, Ereda, Narva, Hamburg, and Bergen Belsen for two years. She built forts and hiding places for the German army or made ammunition for them. She worked on an empty stomach and an empty spot in her heart. She had no family and no food. Her stomach growled for attention, and her face was lined with despair.

Bergen Belsen was the worst, but the last. Here, Sheila worked under the same conditions that she had been working in at the last labor camps: without food, without family, without hope, and with a deep sadness. She was once again taken on the cargo train. She was stuffed in with other people, feeling fear and confusion and no room to breathe. I imagined her thinking: ""Where am I going now?' I rode in the train, feeling the cold freeze through the little crack of the barred space. I saw the trees camouflage into the cold snow I was leaving behind as we drove. The ride wasn't as smooth as the rides are here. The roads were forced through over the time by the big chains from the army cars. The smell of the train wouldn't be considered as a smell, but a nightmare.

"Every bad smell was composed into one. Suddenly the cargo train stopped. We all murmured guesses as to why we paused. I tried looking out the barred space. We heard yells

from men. They were words that hit you in the chest because of how they said it. It was a different language, so I didn't understand it. The darkness of the cargo train was hit by a powerful push of cold wind and bright light. A man in an army suit and a gun motioned us to come out. The other men dressed just like him were standing behind him looking at us. 'You are liberated! You are free!' he said. These words brought excitement from within. They jump-started your heart when it was down. I couldn't help but put on a smile from the disbelief happening around me. I hugged whoever was near me and cried tears of joy. My pain was flying off and replaced by hope."

Sheila was liberated on May 3, 1945, in Malmo, Sweden. The Swedish Red Cross liberated her and many others. After being liberated, they were allowed by the army to live in Sweden and work helping them to rebuild their life again. After being liberated, Sheila and the other survivors were transferred to a recovery house/ center. "It took me about a year to recover. We made it to the center looking more like dead people because we were so skinny. Even though we were starving, we weren't able to swallow food."

After Sheila was healthy enough, she began to work at the Luma Factory, a coat factory in Stockholm. In 1947, she met her husband. Sheila still had the urge to move away because she didn't want to be near Russians and Germans. She contacted her only family who lived through the war. Her cousin, Ella Bunes, helped Sheila get her papers and travel to the United States on the Exodus, a boat that brought many Jews to this country.

Before the war broke out, Sheila's mother had sent her cousin in Chicago pictures of her family. Sheila has these pictures to this day: the orange-gray photo and the gray, with black and white features.

Clara Weinberger

By Shelby Getsla

As I sat on a dining room chair in her home, I wondered what Clara Weinberger would have to tell me. After exchanging pleasantries, I decided to get the paperwork for the interview out of the way. I had just begun to open my mouth when she asked me in a stern tone, "Do you believe the Holocaust actually happened? If you don't, I have nothing to say to you." I was caught off guard by the question but immediately responded, "Absolutely." I looked at her and smiled admiring the combination of her direct demeanor. It was at that moment that the interview began.

Clara Weisz was eighteen when the Nazis took her and her family from their home in Hungary. Her family was told that they would be going away to work, and packed their bags with only necessities. As she looked back at her home, she saw a neighbor watch blankly from a window and was saddened that they didn't say goodbye. Unsure of where they were going, the Weisz family finally arrived at a farm with many other Jewish families. They stayed for ten days and worked on the farm.

On May 23, 1944, Clara and her family were transported in cattle cars to Auschwitz-Birkenau. "There were 60-70 people in one car. The bathroom was a bucket. It was embarrassing to use it, but the ride was three days long." When the family arrived, Clara, her two brothers, parents, grandfather, and younger sister were separated into two lines by age. Those sent to the left tine by the Nazis were gassed and sent to the crematory. Those to the right were sent to work. Clara and her younger brother were the only two in the family sent to the right. "My father was killed for being good. He wouldn't leave my grandfather. My [older] brother, too," Clara said. "My sister was only four and half years old so my mother wouldn't let her go alone, so she went with her."

Unlike many of the other prisoners, most Hungarians were not tattooed. "They didn't bother to tattoo the numbers on us because they didn't think we would last that long. They thought we'd be dead soon anyway." First, the Nazis shaved the new prisoners' heads. Next, they received their work clothes because all the prisoners had been told to leave their suitcases behind on the farm. They were then sent to the barracks, which were assigned by gender. "There were beds four flours high and there were six people in one row in each bed. We all had to turn together because otherwise there was no room."

After the first two to three days, a Nazi doctor came into Clara's barrack smiling. He asked them in a very kind, warm way, "Is there anything you need? Anything you are missing?" Believing the inquiry was genuine, many answered asked for water. For the next three days, no one in the barrack received water. Each morning, the prisoners lined up outside the barracks for inspection and roll call. Their fellow captives would support many of those who were too sick or too tired to stand on their own. "If one person was missing, everyone had to stand there until that person was found."

After a few months, Clara developed painful arthritis. She was told there would be medicine available, so she went to a building outside the barracks. As she stood in line, she suddenly noticed that people went into the "medicine dispensary" but no one came out. "There was no back door. I knew something had to be wrong. I left. That decision saved my life." Clara was second in line when she left.

Clara had various jobs during her imprisonment. She boiled dirty laundry, worked in the kitchen, and gave Nazi women manicures. "They asked me what I did at home. I was a beautician so they asked me to give them manicures. I was so afraid. What if I accidentally cut their fingers?"

Clara rarely experienced kindness from the Nazi guards, but one man stood out to her. "He would clear the dishes. He came into the laundry room behind the kitchen with a tray of food and told us to eat. He said, 'These aren't leftovers. They're from the kitchen.' We didn't care. We just ate."

Around the Christmas of 1944, Clara was transferred to Bergen-Belsen. There she was forced to participate in the infamous Death March, but she managed to survive the thirty five miles. At the end of the trek was a train station, full of cattle cars taking prisoners to other concentration camps. While waiting to board the cattle cars, Clara ran into her friend (her future sister-in-law), who was leaving Bergen-Belsen to be transferred to Auschwitz. Fortunately, her friend was able to switch places with another person who wanted to remain at Auschwitz, and did not have to board the cattle cars. Clara, along with her friend and many more, were forced to continue the Death March, eventually finding themselves back at Bergen-Belsen.

Clara stayed at Bergen-Belsen until the camp's liberation on April 15, 1945 by American soldiers. She was in and out of consciousness for two weeks after the liberation. When she finally regained consciousness for a sustained period of time, she woke to the face of a Hungarian doctor. He exclaimed, "You're alive!"

After she regained most of her strength, Clara along with her future sister-in-law decided to immigrate to Sweden with other survivors on boats provided by the Allied governments. While Clara saw her health improving, the health of her friend was diminishing. She passed away on the boat to Sweden. Clara stayed there for over a year and a half, working in a shoe factory and living in an modest apartment.

In February 1946, Clara Weisz married Bela Weinberger, the brother of her deceased friend. Bela had been forced to stay in Hungary during the war to work in agriculture. They stayed in Europe until 1956 when Clara, Bela, and their young son, George, moved to the United States. The family soon took up roots in San Francisco, California. Four years later in 1960, Clara was reunited with her younger brother, who currently resides in Israel with a family of his own. Shortly after their reconciliation, Clara gave birth to her second son, Jimmy. The family was struck with grief when Bela passed away in 1990, but Clara continues to live in San Francisco and remains the proud matron of the Weinberger family.

Since the war Clara says, “I will never go back to Germany. My brother won’t either. He won’t ever go back to Hungary or Germany”. Despite these sentiments, she has made a few trips to Europe and even went to visit her childhood home in Hungary. She lamented, “They wouldn’t let me in. I just wanted to see it. They wouldn’t even let me see.”

When I asked her if she had any last remarks before the end of the interview, she said, “There was no justice. Millions were killed. And for what? [The Nazis] didn’t do any good.”

Toni Wolf

By Sonia Bernick

Displaced

"We saw the Nazis and were told, 'you kids go away,' so my older sister, Rose, and I ran." It was September 1939, and Krakow was invaded by the Germans. Life for Toni Wolf was forever changed.

I nervously approached Toni's house, eager to meet her. As I walked up the stairs and turned down the hallway, I saw her standing outside her door from afar. She greeted me with a hug and a kiss. I felt at home.

Toni experienced a typical childhood until World War I, when life in Krakow was disrupted by chaos, disease, food shortages, inflation, and an economic standstill that plagued the community. As World War II approached, the rights and freedoms of Jews became limited. Some Jews were physically attacked in the streets; others fled to the East; few were admitted to schools. Eventually, in December 1939, Jewish schools and synagogues were closed, and all rituals were prohibited for the Jews. Many fled the city and others sought shelter in neighboring villages; some stayed and suffered from hunger and cold. The mortality rate rose to 13 times higher than the prewar level. By 1941, the Nazis had forced more than 18,000 Jews into the Krakow Ghetto, though contact with the outside world was permitted. By the end of May 1942, Jews were either murdered or deported to concentration camps, namely Plaszow or Auschwitz. "Krakow was a beautiful city before the Nazis came and destroyed everything," Toni said to me as we sat at her kitchen table.

Toni and her older sister, Rose, were told to run away, and they escaped to Russia with Rose's husband. However, when they reached a massive body of water, they ran into two soldiers. The soldiers took Toni away. That was the last time she saw any of her family members: "I did not know where I was in Russia, I didn't know the language, they just took me and put me in a small room."

Toni was sent to Poland's Majdanek concentration camp. She stayed there until the liberation on July 22, 1944. During the Holocaust, Toni was often sick in the hospital. She would lie on her cold stone bed as the empty, hollow walls of the hospital seemed to cave in closer. She used to see an older Russian mother, sweating nervously. In a neighboring bed, hovering over her child, she would pray her child would live, frantically looking around the room, searching for hope.

Although Toni didn't know Russian, one day the mother came over and shared food with her: "I would not still be here if it weren't for her," Toni said. "I will never forget it." This gesture spoke more than words to her.

"We were displaced persons," Toni told me. After the war, Toni and hundreds of others wandered with no money, overwhelmed by freedom after years of solidarity. Toni was relocated

to West Germany and lived in a displaced persons camp until 1949. Toni met her husband, Saul Wolfgang, and they had a son, Adam, in Poland. When Adam was four, they moved to America. Toni moved from South Dakota to Colorado before she found her permanent home, in San Francisco, where she has lived for 53 years. While in San Francisco, Toni and Saul volunteered for the Jewish Community Center for 20 years in hopes of helping other elders and sharing Toni's strength of character. In 1986, Toni and her husband won the Volunteer of the Year award.

Luckily for Toni, she is still here to share her inspirational story of survival. Before Toni begins her story, she points to the happy birthday balloon a few feet away and smiles. "I am 91, but I don't feel old," she said. "I don't want to feel old." She was born on January 30, 1918, one of seven children. By the age of 20, surrounded by hatred, she was struggling to stay alive.

As the interviewed ended, Toni gave me a tour of her apartment and showed me pictures of her son, Adam, and two grandsons, Jonathan and David, and their families. Before I left, she insisted on giving me a flower and juice, and reminded me to always stay strong. As I slowly walked down the hallway, reflecting upon my experience, she called after me, "Don't be a stranger!" She smiled and waved goodbye.

Assemblymember Tony Mendoza
District 56

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

Miriam Brookfield *Interviewed by Simi Sardana*

Miriam Brookfield

By Simi Sardana

From Eastern Germany to the United States: A Survivor's Journey to Freedom

Miriam Fleischmann was in grade school in Chemnitz, Germany when her teacher noticed the other children treating her differently. The teacher spoke with Miriam's mother and told her about the anti-Semitism he was witnessing inside of the classroom, and advised her mother to move Miriam to a city with a larger Jewish population. Miriam's parents did just that, and sent Miriam to live with her grandmother an hour away. At this point Jews were not allowed to attend public schools, and were forced to be segregated in parochial schools.

Miriam was only 10 years old when she began to feel the tension between Jews and non-Jews escalate. She recalls feeling extremely afraid as she walked down the streets of the city. She avoided contact with non-Jews out of fear of being physically harmed. The only social activity Miriam participated in was a Jewish youth group in which she found comfort and solace. They were isolated from everyone. Jews were not allowed to go to public places such as parks, swimming pools, restrooms, and certain grocery stores. Park signs would read "no dogs, no Jews." As a child Miriam was exposed to the growing anti-Semitism fostering in Nazi Germany.

In November of 1938 Hitler's anti-Semitic policy was acted out in what is now known as Kristallnacht – the Night of Broken Glass. The German Nazi government led a full force attack against all Jewish establishments and people. All stores owned by Jews were destroyed, and all synagogues were burned to the ground. Many Jews were killed, and many more were captured and sent to concentration camps. Miriam's family knew they were in danger and spent that two day period wandering the streets. They stayed out of the light and out of any area where they would be visible by the Nazis. Eventually they found a haven in the Polish embassy where they could spend the night in and hide from the violence.

The quality of life for Jews, including Miriam and her family, was deteriorating quickly. Miriam's father knew that leaving Germany was their best hope for survival. Leaving Germany, however, was no easy task. Different countries had different requirements that Miriam's family did not meet. At the time the United States required them to have a sponsor in order to prove that one would not become a burden on the public system. Unfortunately, Miriam had no family in the U.S. that could help them. Miriam's father had heard of a way to leave Germany by paying someone to take you across the boarder and into France. He attempted to cross five times and every time he was caught.

He eventually ran out of money and called his wife to send him more money to try once more. However, the German Nazi government had wire tapped his conversation and arrested him for allegedly trying to smuggle money out of Germany and undermine the German economy. When Miriam found out her father was in jail she begged her mother to let her go see him in jail. "My father was a very formal man," said Miriam as she was recounting the story. "He was never caught without a suit and a tie" she added. His appearance was of a completely different man than the image that Miriam had for her father. His clothes were worn out and he

was robbed of all his personal belongings. They even took his shoe laces, tie and belt because they did not want him to hang himself. Eventually Miriam's father was put on trial and found not guilty of any wrongdoing by the Civil Court.

Before he was released a police officer informed Miriam's mother that the Nazi government wanted to put her father in a concentration camp for his own "safety" to protect him from the German citizens who were angry about his release. The police officer advised her mother to find a way out of Germany as soon as possible to avoid this. As luck would have it, Miriam's mother found out about three extra tickets to China on a boat leaving within the next couple of days. This boat, however, was leaving from Italy so they quickly had to give away all their belongings and make their way there. With just a few bags Miriam and her mother met her father at the train station where the police escorted him and they departed from there.

Miriam's family was sealed on the train from Germany until Switzerland. After going over the Swiss Alps, Miriam and her family boarded a boat with roughly 400 other refugees. For 28 days the family was on the boat, and because of Miriam's ability to speak English fluently she became the interpreter. They arrived in Shanghai where they were put into a refugee camp. For eight years Miriam and her family lived in this camp unaware of the atrocities happening back at home. With very little to eat the family did anything to survive. Each person in the family tried to make money by creating jobs for themselves.

During the time they spent in China they were exposed to many various tropical diseases that they were not immune to. Many people in the camp had typhoid, small pox, and cholera to name a few. For eight years the family lived in dire circumstances, and wondered when, if ever, this would end. Miriam shared about the various surviving mechanisms people came up with. Her family owned a cat and her father used to rent it out to other families as a mice catcher to word off diseases.

Eventually the war came to an end and with help from a committee Miriam's family was able to leave the camp. This organization brought Miriam and her family to San Francisco where they were put in a hotel until they could be distributed throughout the country. Miriam did not want to wait any longer to start her life and she immediately obtained a job as a secretary. When the committee told her family they found a place for them in Philadelphia, Miriam refused. She wanted to stay in San Francisco and continue at her job. Her parents did not want to leave her alone in a foreign country, and decided to stay with her in California. This decision cost them all the funding they were receiving from the committee, but staying together was far more important than money. In time both of her parents acquired fulfilling jobs.

Some time later Miriam Fleischmann and Howard Brookfield met at her house through a mutual friend. He was serving in the air force and had gone to pick up a friend at Miriam's house. Howard was intrigued by her for her ability to speak German fluently. They both had very much in common, as Howard was also from Germany and his family was able to escape the Holocaust. In 1953 Miriam and Howard were married, and fifty-six years later Miriam and Howard are still happily married with three children: Debbie, Leslie, and David.

Now that Miriam and Howard are retired they spend their time very involved in the community. Miriam currently resides as the Executive Director of the Ezra Center in Downey, a senior group that meets regularly, bringing in speakers of all kinds, from educators to politicians. She is also very involved at Temple Ner Tamid in Downey; as 2nd Vice President she is in charge of Religious Affairs. Miriam also serves as treasurer of another senior group that meets in Whittier. Miriam is an amazing woman who overcame many tribulations and has used them as opportunities to become the well rounded person she is today. She has lived on three continents; Europe, Asia and North America. Miriam and Howard have gone back to Europe together to revisit their origins and try to remember what life was like before the Holocaust. By visiting their native Germany they have put together many pieces of the puzzle to retell their stories.

Assemblymember Jeff Miller
District 71

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Louis VanderMolen

Interviewed by Ari Dana

Louis VanderMolen

By Ari Dana

Louis VanderMolen was born in 1917 in Hillegom, Holland. He was raised on his father's dairy farm with five siblings; two brothers, and three sisters. He received an education through university in Holland, and went to work at a nearby dairy, until the war came to Holland. For seventeen years Mr. VanderMolen worked milking cows at the dairy, for the last ten years he was the dairy manager. Mr. VanderMolen's older brother served in the Dutch army and fought against the Germans when they invaded Holland, but left the army after the country was conquered.

When Mr. VanderMolen sat to be interviewed, he was sorry that so long had passed, that he could only remember certain details of the war, and the part he played in the Dutch resistance. The stories he was able to recount paint a picture of courage, and the will to help his neighbors and countrymen survive a vicious conquest.

Mr. VanderMolen awoke on the day that Germany began the invasion of Holland to the sound of bombs bursting all around him. Everyone had been following the progress of the Nazis, in Germany, and then across Europe, they knew about Kristallnacht, and had heard of concentration camps but were powerless to respond. It was a great shock to hear bombs falling in the small farming town where he lived. His whole family ran to the radio to find out what was happening, it was then that they learned of the military invasion of Holland. Within months, listening to the news, or anything else for that matter, on the radio would no longer be a possibility.

When the Nazis conquered Holland, Queen Wilhemina escaped to England, leaving her country to the will of the German war machine. Soon strict rations were placed on everything from food to bicycle tires. Mr. VanderMolen and his wife Ada, who was his girlfriend at the time, explained that there were very few Jews in Hillegom, and that those who did live there were the same as anyone else, but when the Nazis came, everything changed. Because the Dutch had no history of anti-Semitism, when the Jews were singled out by the Nazis, solidarity with them from the general population became even stronger. Jews were forced to wear yellow stars, and their movements were much more restricted than those of the general population, who had a nighttime curfew. Jews were not given ration-stamps, and were therefore unable to obtain food or buy clothing or other necessities. Mr. VanderMolen explained that he, and other young Dutchmen who saw this oppression, would go out after curfew to buy food, and take it to Jewish homes. As he explained it, they would do everything they could to make life bearable throughout the war.

As the war progressed, and eventually turned against Germany, life became unbearable. Ration stamps were increasingly difficult to obtain, news from the outside world was cut off and every bit of industrial material, including the machinery from the dairy where Mr. VanderMolen worked before the war, was taken to serve the Nazi cause. At this time, about the last three years of the war, Jews began to be rounded up and taken from their homes, eastward, to the camps.

Mr. VanderMolen had been involved in resisting the Germans from the beginning but now he became a full fledged member of the unofficial resistance. He explained that the unofficial resistance was safer, as there was no paper work to tie to other members, or to an organized group; for this reason it was also more effective. The resistance worked to help their people against the Nazis; they would help obtain food and daily necessities, sometimes by attacking ration offices to get the stamps they needed. The resistance would find the names of Jews, and of enemies of the Nazis and find them before the Germans did. There were no travel records, and no plans laid out on paper. They would arrive at a targeted Jewish family's house, take them out, hide them in a barn or a safe place and move them to the North Sea where they would be taken on row boats to meet with ships that would carry them to England. They would do the same for political targets. As air raids increased over the skies of Holland, Mr. VanderMolen and his unofficial resistance would follow the parachute trails of allied pilots that were forced to eject from their airplanes and would attempt to rescue them before they were caught by the Germans. Mr. VanderMolen explained that the Nazi army never followed the laws of war and would kill prisoners when they were caught, even shooting pilots as they fell to the ground. As they did with the Jews, the members of the resistance would find the pilots and take them to a safe place where other members could receive them and help them continue their escape back to England. Many times the resistance was successful, but sometimes the Nazis would arrive first.

Mr. VanderMolen had falsified travel documents that he used to travel around Holland, mostly by foot, and that allowed him to be out after curfew to continue resistance activities. Being caught was an ever-looming danger, and capture meant near-certain death. Mr. VanderMolen took various measures to ensure his safety; his father built a hiding place under the floorboards of his house where Mr. VanderMolen and other members of the resistance could hide when their home was being searched. His girlfriend, Ada had a similar hiding place built in her house as well in case Mr. VanderMolen or one of his friends had to hide. There was not always time to hide and Mr. VanderMolen was caught twice.

On one occasion, Mr. VanderMolen and other members of the resistance were forced to run from his home, and hide under a pile of straw in a nearby field. It was the last winter of the war, and the weather was cold and wet. Mr. VanderMolen was forced to sneak back to his home, through a ditch that ran by the field all the way to his house, to gather as much warm clothing as he could. His mother wrapped all of the families' warmest clothes around him and tied it to him with belts. On the way back to the field where his friends were hiding, Nazi soldiers saw the bundle of clothing tied to his back and shot at him. The clothing was hit, but protected his body. Mr. VanderMolen laid in the ditch and pretended to be dead until the soldiers had passed. When he finally arrived to the pile of straw where his friends were hiding, the soldiers were closing in. Mr. VanderMolen, who was usually the leader of his group, instructed those who were with him to escape in groups of two, out further into the fields. As Mr. VanderMolen was escaping, the man walking next to him was killed. Mr. VanderMolen threw up his arms and was taken prisoner. Luckily, Ada saw this and ran to the owner of the dairy for whom Mr. VanderMolen used to work. The owner of the dairy knew a German commander and asked him what he could do to free his employee. By this time food was scarce, even for the Germans, and all it took was a half a pound of butter from the dairy to free Mr. VanderMolen; today Ada, who is now his wife, jokes with him that he is only worth a half a pound of butter.

During the final winter of the war, conditions were terrible for everyone. There was no food in Holland and people would walk for miles from the cities to look for food in the farms. People died of starvation on the sides of roads, and the Germans had taken to shooting anyone that did not follow the rules. It was common to see people lined up on the side of the road and shot. At this time, as he had done occasionally throughout the war, Mr. VanderMolen's father would keep his barn open at night, so that travelers could have somewhere to sleep, and some warmth from the proximity of the cows. Here he would give travelers milk and whatever food could be spared, and also hide people behind stacks of hay.

When the war came to an end, Holland was destroyed. The queen had promised over "radio orange"— the illegal Dutch news station that was broadcast into Holland from England during the war— that all businesses would be rebuilt after the war with help from the Dutch government. But, that help only went to the largest businesses and corporations. The dairy at which Mr. VanderMolen was employed was informed that they would have to find work at a larger company; it was then that Mr. VanderMolen and his now wife, Ada, decided they had to leave for America.

In 1951, a distant VanderMolen relative, who lived in California, went to visit his family in Holland. Because his parents had nowhere for the relative to stay, he lived at the home of Mr. VanderMolen and Ada. There he spoke to them about California, and when they asked if he could help them get there, he replied yes. After securing visas, Mr. and Mrs. VanderMolen and their two eldest children, traveled to Antwerp, Belgium, where they embarked on the Leerdam to New York. In New York, Traveler's Aid gave them train tickets to Chicago. Because they did not have reservations for the train to Los Angeles, they were stuck in Chicago for 5 days before they were given airplane tickets to Los Angeles. Once they arrived in Los Angeles, their sponsor's son picked them up from the airport and drove them to the dairy in Artesia where Mr. VanderMolen would work. He began working right away. Eventually he moved to another dairy in Norco where he was paid significantly more and was given days off. In Norco, he began painting houses for extra money, and eventually entered the construction field. Mr. VanderMolen was very successful and he bought five acres in Norco, today the VanderMolen Center. Mr. VanderMolen has served his community since first moving to Norco, and served on the School Board for seventeen years, even now he occasionally works with them. Today Mr. and Mrs. VanderMolen have five children, a contractor, a school district superintendent, a cancer researcher and an office assistant. Mr. VanderMolen is the owner of VanderMolen Investments Inc., which he runs with his wife. To honor his service to the school board, VanderMolen Elementary in Norco will open in June of 2009.

Assemblymember Pedro Nava

District 35

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

The following stories are contributed from "Portraits of Survival," a permanent collection of contemporary portraits, biographical histories and archival material depicting the lives of Santa Barbara area residents who are survivors and refugees of the Holocaust and whose stories are provided here.

Charles Bergere
Lelah Hopp
Ron Stern

Portraits of Survival: Life Journeys: During the Holocaust and Beyond
A permanent exhibit in photography sponsored by
Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara ~ located at
Bronfman Family Jewish Community Center
524 Chapala Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Here is my story during the dark years.

Born in Paris, France on June 19, 1929.

At the beginning of the war, I was evacuated near Le Mans, approximately 200 miles West of Paris with hundreds of other Parisian children. We were in an abandoned castle.

Later, my aunt, who was a teacher in the same province, picked me up and I lived with her in a small village. On June 19, 1940, the Germans came through- on my birthday! Some gift! I went back to Paris and went to school. The first edicts against Jews were coming in but I was totally unaware of what the Vichy government had in store. I was French and knew nothing of Jewish matters. As the situation worsened, a French Countess, Madam de Ganay, put me in a Catholic seminar where I was duly baptized, received my first communion, and started my education to become a priest. Another roommate of mine became a priest - and eventually cardinal of Paris, Monsignor Lustinger.

In the meantime, my whole family was arrested by the French police and deported to Auschwitz. We were told that it was temporary and they were going to work and would be back after the war. None came back - grandfather, aunt, uncles. My mother was also arrested, but escaped.

In 1943, children were allowed to cross into the unoccupied zone of France. I was with them and rejoined my father, who was demobilized and living in the south of France, the province of Dordogne. Eventually, the Germans entered the unoccupied zone and the nightmare began. I was going to school when a group of partisans entered the town. I asked them to take me and they accepted. My parents knew nothing of my leaving the school. They gave me a nickname, Ovistiti, and a Sten machine gun. We were living in various barns and even a castle. My group was called Groupe Soleil. We fought mainly the French militia, executed collaborators, and for a while, avoided the Germans, who were too well armed. One day, my group was ambushed by a battalion of German SS, part of the division Das Reich. Twenty of us got killed, but we killed at least 45 SS. We escaped but they came back, burned the town and killed some inhabitants. They gave the rest to the French militia who shot some and deported the women to Ravensburg in Germany.

The Groupe Soleil grew in size. Many Spanish Republican refugees joined us and, of course, many communists. We even had a German soldier deserter, Fritz, who became our cook. We liberated several large towns and finally laid siege to the fort of La Rochelle on the Atlantic Coast. Many groups of partisans took action in this siege, which lasted from October 1944 to May 1945. Our aim was to prevent the 20,000 Germans to get to the back of the Patton Army who were near Belgium.

Early in 1945, General de Gaulle had all partisans integrated in a regular French Army coming from the South. He feared a communist take over after the war and was successful in

neutralizing all those various groups of partisans. During a patrol, my little group of nine was taken prisoners of a German Patrol but I escaped and reformed my unit.

Finally the war ended. I went back to Paris, went briefly to a military school but could not stand the atmosphere. I went to dental college with the idea to become a dentist.

I met Pat, a young British Jewish girl, and fell in love instantly. However, she had other plans for me. I found out that she worked for the Irgun, a Jewish illegal army that was buying and shipping weapons to Palestine. She made me an accomplice and I stored all kinds of bombs, grenades and guns in the apartment of my mother who was in England. We had to move the weapons to another location and I was transporting suitcases full of bombs on the Paris subway. Eventually Pat went to Palestine, which became Israel. I lost contact.

In 1949, I was drafted in the French Army, destination Indochina. I deserted and found my way in Canada. In 1963, I was married and moved to California.

Three years ago, through the internet, I rediscovered members of the Groupe Soleil. My commandant is still alive. We meet once a year to have a big reunion. I go there every year. It brings back painful memories.

Anyway, this is my story. I do not consider myself a victim of the Holocaust as I had the good fortune to meet the enemy on equal footing.

Lelah Hopp

As told to Sandra Coopersmith

Jew Child

It is difficult to convey the terror I felt when I heard heavy Nazi boots stomping down the steps of the cellar in which I was hiding, or the feeling of yearning to be free while looking out the cellar window. The story that follows is full of dates and events that happened, and the feelings of terror and the yearning will have to be imagined.

The night of June 22, 1941, I woke up to what seemed to be a thunderstorm - but was a cannonade. The Germans had started their invasion of Russia. My mother and I were living in Brest Litovsk right on the border that divided the German-occupied part of Poland from the Russian-occupied part. The occupation by the Germans was immediate, surprising everybody, including the Russian military. The black tide rolled in and the nightmare began. I was nine years old.

My first awareness that there was something wrong was the disappearance of all of the males in my father's family. It was only later that I discovered that they were all rounded up, taken away, and shot. Mother and I moved in with my paternal grandmother and all the other female relatives and their children. My maternal grandparents, considered enemies of the state by the communists because they owned a shoe store, had already been asked to leave Brest Litovsk in 1940. I later heard - and it's amazing how news got around by word of mouth without any of the technical wonders we use today -that they and other Jews were rounded up and made to dig their own graves. The rabbi at the open pit asked the people there to forgive those who were about to shoot them.

In the fall of 1941, we, too, were rounded up and moved into the ghetto. It was surrounded by a tall barbed wire fence with one gate. The only way out of the ghetto was to go to an established workplace to serve the German army. You had to have your yellow star prominently displayed on your chest and on your back, and you were not allowed to use the sidewalk. The women were sent out to the army barracks to clean and do laundry. There was very little food, and we bought edibles in grams. Once my grandmother gave me a potato latke, and that was the height of luxury. I also remember getting very sick. I think it was tonsillitis, and Mother brought me a tomato, partly for the vitamins and partly to cheer me up. I've loved tomatoes ever since.

People tried to maintain as much of a semblance of normalcy as possible, but it was impossible to get used to the horse-drawn wagon, driven by German soldiers who would stop at the house of their choice and take whatever they wished. Every day you could hear the *clip clop* of the horses' hooves from far away on the cobblestone streets.

One afternoon in the fall of 1942 Mother learned from a local policeman that the entire civilian police force of Brest Litovsk was being asked to report for duty early the following morning. It had happened in other ghettos where police and the Gestapo would sweep through,

pick up all of the children and the infirm, and leave the workforce behind. Since I was all of ten, she needed to protect me and we had to get out for what we thought would be just a few days. The only way out was with a group of other women leaving to go to work. We went to the ghetto gate, waited, and joined a group. The women surrounded me so I would not be all that visible and we made it out.

After a while we left the group and, minus our mandatory yellow stars, walked on the sidewalk, eventually winding up at the door of a Christian family who were friends of my mother. They agreed to hide us for a few days. They were living in the section of the house that comprised the servants' quarters, the major part of the house having been commandeered by a high-ranking German officer and his adjutant. A tiny hallway separated the major part of the house from the servants' quarters. On the German side it was boarded up. A doorway opened onto the servants' quarters. That hallway became our hiding place. The doorway was then concealed by a large hall tree storage bench.

The "cleansing" of the ghetto went on for days. One night, a few days into our stay, two very young Jewish girls who were about my age knocked on the family's door. They were from the orphanage in the ghetto, had hidden on the orphanage grounds as the Germans swept through, stayed hidden and, when they thought it was safe, came to the family for help. A few days after that two teenage Jewish girls knocked on the door, and now we were six, with precious little room in that hallway. We couldn't make any noise whatsoever because on the other side of that very thin partition lived the enemy.

The two younger girls were sent to a farm family for safekeeping. Eventually Mother and I had to leave as well. According to the adjutant who came to warn the family, the German officer had reported the family to the Gestapo, apparently in revenge because the family's daughter had rejected his advances. Since we were local and the two teenage girls were not, the family suggested that Mother and I find ourselves another hiding place and they would take a chance with the two teenagers. A friend of my mother's came to our rescue. She shared her tiny basement apartment with a woman who used to be her servant and was now a Nazi sympathizer. The former servant was getting a nice large place of her own and would be moving in a few days.

In the meantime, we had to be hidden from her. We were given a tiny niche in the wall, separated from the rest of the apartment by a folding screen, with just enough space for Mother and me to sit on two stools, with no coughing, sneezing, moving, or any other noise permitted while the former servant was in the apartment.

From the half window of that basement I'd see children playing in the street and long to join them. Once I saw a woman walk by wearing one of my mother's dresses.

In the summer of 1944 with the Russian army advancing on Brest Litovsk, the Germans decided to empty the city of its civilian population. By then Mother had a false passport and I had a false birth certificate with the last name matching Mother's. She bribed a Hungarian who had been conscripted into the German army to smuggle us out of town and into the countryside. He dropped us off in the middle of a tiny village in front of a farmer whom he seemed to know.

The farmer suggested that we go to another village where he knew a widowed farmer who might need a housekeeper. We did so and were hired, Mother as housekeeper and I as a shepherdess in charge of a flock of sheep and a lone cow that was totally uncooperative. We were officially registered in the village as Mrs. Karpinska and her daughter, Halina. Our first meal at the farmhouse was a thick soup. Floating in it were large chunks of pork skin still bearing the bristles. We ate it.

The gossip in the village was that Mother, who was blond and blue-eyed, was hiding a Jewish child. My darker coloring and features favored my father, who had died in 1934. At the time my mother heard of this gossip, I had developed a huge boil on the bottom of my foot and was unable to move around very well, so was sitting in the orchard. Some farmhands nearby kept looking at me. One of them yelled “Jew child!” and I looked up. I told Mother about this later and we were mortified. I had given us away. Shortly thereafter Russian soldiers started drifting into the village and we were safe. It was August, 1944. For us the Nazi nightmare was over.

Ronald Stern

I was born as Rudolf Hans-Gustav Stern on October 27, 1927, in Charlottenburg, Berlin, Germany, to Regierungsrat [Senior Civil Servant, literally Government Adviser, in England, Privy Counsellor], Dr. Ernst Stern, born 1891, and my mother, Margarete née Frankenstein, born 1887. I was named after Hans-Gustav Wagner, my father's best friend, with whom he attended school and with whom he served in the German Army in World War 1, and who became my godfather; he was not Jewish. My father's family lived for many generations in Montabaur, a small farming town about 15 miles east of Koblenz in Rheinland, Germany. There they built, owned, and operated the town's hardware and lumber store, which was located on the ground floor of their three-storey house until 1937, when my father's brother, Albert, who was managing the business was forced to sell it to a Nazi for a pittance, and to whom he was forced to sell the house in 1938. He then moved with his family to Berlin, where he was arrested and sent to the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. My aunt spent the subsequent days, and weeks to get his release, which meant paying a lot of money. He was freed after six to seven weeks on condition that he had to leave Germany in a matter of weeks. That is why he came to London without my aunt and their son; his daughter was already with us in London. England at that time issued permits to the men but not to their families. That is the reason why many families were not reunited. My aunt and son came to England a few days before he emigrated with his wife and two children to New Zealand, where he bought a hardware business, in spite of the fact that he did not, at that time, speak English.

All Jewish men aged between 16 and 65 throughout Germany were incarcerated. The men in Montabaur were taken to Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

My father's older sister Hilda had visited us in London in 1938, and my father begged her not to return to Germany, but she insisted on returning because of her husband, then residing in a mental institution, suffering, probably from what we now know as Alzheimer's disease. The Nazis euthanized all mental patients. Hilda was killed in Auschwitz, as were other family members from Montabaur. The son of one of those families, also cousins, arrived in England in 1939 on a Kindertransport and came to live and grow up with us. He now lives in Newcastle, England with wife, children, and adult grandchildren. His last vision of his mother was of her being kicked down the stairs of the family home by a Nazi. The same Nazi who “bought” my uncle's house and business, forced her husband to covey the house to him as a condition of the husband's release from Buchenwald Camp, although not long thereafter he died with his wife in Auschwitz.

My mother was born in Dortmund, Germany, and grew up in Berlin where her father published a newspaper for the garment industry. She appeared on stage in Berlin as a “Rezitatorin” [Reciter], doing monologues consisting of reading poetry and literature. During Word War 1, in addition to her other performances, she performed for the troops, and in military hospitals. She later joined a book-publishing company in Stuttgart that published a novel written by my father's friend, the now-author, Hans-Gustav Wagner, who introduced her to my father. My parents married in August 1924.

In 1919 my father joined the Reichsernaehrungsministerium [Ministry of Food] as a consultant, later joining the Reichswirtschaftsministerium [Ministry of Economics] and the Statistisches Reichsamt [Statistics Office]. In 1923 he published his book “Der Höchstpreis”[The Highest Price] concerning price restrictions in time of inflation. That book is still available in German universities. He later was an economist at the Reichskreditgesellshaft, a German bank owned by the Reich, from where he was dismissed shortly after the Nazis came to power on January 30, 1933.

In England, Sir Henry Strakosch, chairman of the board of the *Economist*, a magazine published in England and the United States, and chairman of the Union Corporation Ltd., took the opportunity and appointed my father as economic adviser to the Corporation, from where he retired in 1956. He died in London in 1971.

In the spring of 1933 my mother took my 7½-year-old sister and 5-year-old-me to England and deposited us in a boarding school somewhere in Surrey, and returned to Germany to settle the family's affairs. Shortly after our arrival there, we both became ill with some kind of contagious disease. The school authorities thereupon parked us in a little room in the attic of the building and left us there until our mother came to take us back to Germany. As we spoke no English, and could not read or write, at least I could not, having so far not attended any school, and in any event knew no English, I do not now know what we did with ourselves. Eventually my mother arrived and took us back to Germany.

My father arrived in England in June 1933, and after returning to Berlin in September of that year to help my mother to dispose of our house, he was arrested by the Gestapo and taken to their headquarters at Prinz-Albrecht Strasse 8. There he was imprisoned in a subterranean cell and beaten. My mother managed successfully, to find someone who ordered the Gestapo to release him after ten days. It is thought that he may have been arrested for writing articles in the *Economist* about Germany. One year later, my father, an athletic man who ski-jumped and sailed a small yacht on Berlin's Wansee Lake, suffered a severe heart attack, which he survived, and thereafter lived another 29 years. My parents believed that the beating he received brought on that heart attack.

We children left Berlin again, in approximately July 1933 with Ida, our German Nanny, via Montabaur, and Cologne, to Le Cocque sur Mère, Belgium near Ostend. We went there because close family friends were there, as was their friend, Albert Einstein. On approximately October 4, 1933, we went again to England, together with that family and Ida.

There the three of us, my sister, Ida, and I, lived in a rented room in a large house in northwest London. Shortly thereafter, my father rented a house in the same neighbourhood, and my sister and I were placed in a local school. There was no bilingual education; we were placed in there with the English children and just picked up the language. At some later time, Ida returned to Germany.

From 1934 to 1940 I attended Whittinghame College, a Jewish boarding school in Brighton, England, that closed its doors in 1967. During the thirties, numerous German Jewish

boys attended that school. In the Fifties and Sixties the Germans were succeeded by Middle Easterners.

In November 1940 our house was seriously damaged by a bomb while my parents were inside, but it did not collapse although it had to be demolished, being rebuilt in 1951. It would have collapsed and killed my parents, had not my wise father, after Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain's return from his 1938 meeting with Hitler in Munich, proclaiming “peace in our time”, reinforced the kitchen with floor-to-ceiling beams, and sandbagged the windows. The neighbours thought he was crazy. Thereafter we lived about thirty miles outside London, but in 1943 my father bought a house in the same neighbourhood, which subsequently also received some repairable damage from the blast of the newest German toy, the V-2 supersonic rocket that landed nearby. The vicious problem with that rocket was, that being supersonic, it arrived before its audible sound, so there was no warning.

I joined the Royal Air Force in May 1946, and after completion of service in August 1948, I applied for a visa to emigrate to the United States, arriving in New York by ship on March 28, 1949 and ending my journey in Los Angeles. I became a citizen in June 1954, and in 1961 became an airline pilot, which occupation took me to Berlin in 1963, where I stayed until 1965. There, I met and married a beautiful German girl. We arrived in Santa Barbara in October 1966, when I joined Aerospacelines, Inc., to fly the Boeing Guppies, the specially-built aircraft for NASA for the space program, and that were based in Santa Barbara. My dear wife died in June 2008. I have one daughter, an assistant principal at San Marcos High School, a son-in-law CPA with the Santa Barbara County Auditor, and a 2-year-old granddaughter. I stopped airline-flying in 1977, although thereafter giving some flight instruction for the UCSB Flying Club, retiring in February 1992 from the County of Santa Barbara.

Assemblymember Brian Nestande

District 64

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Bella Roos

Interviewed by Christopher Markarian

Bella Roos

By Christopher Markarian

From the chaos and unimaginable horror of the Holocaust, has emerged a tale of tremendous courage and valor. As a young woman, Bella Roos experienced first-hand the unfathomable barbarism of Nazi Germany and the piercing pangs consequent of great loss. Today, Bella Roos lives to tell her story and share her many experiences while on the run as a fugitive in Nazi Germany. Bella Roos is an extraordinary individual, who persevered through persecution and endured tremendous loss yet emerged a stronger person.

Bella was born in 1921 in Munich, Germany and lived with her parents in an apartment in a middle-class area near the Isar River. Bella's mother, who loved classical music, inspired her daughter to become a concert violinist. After two years of lessons, Bella's mother contacted the Concert Master of the Munich Radio Symphony Orchestra, where Bella auditioned and was later accepted as a student.

With the encouragement of her mother, Bella committed herself to the pursuit of higher education. Her pursuit however, was stymied by the Nazi-endorsed expulsion of all Jewish students from institutions of higher learning. In response, Bella's mother registered her into a private business school and founded a Jewish law firm that hired Bella as an apprentice. In 1938, Bella's father passed away from cancer, leaving Bella and her mother to fend for themselves.

In the summer of 1942 Bella's mother was taken away by soldiers of the notorious SS (*Schutzstaffeln*) death squad and presumably relocated to a concentration or intensive labor camp. Bella was understandably devastated and begged to accompany her mother, but was told the SS would come for her the next morning. That night, intensive allied bombing ensued and Bella's neighbors warned her to seek refuge downstairs in the basement. By morning, Bella was homeless; one of the bombs had destroyed the apartment that Bella and her parents once called home. Now homeless and discouraged, she decided to go to the nearby train station in an attempt to find and board the same transport as her mother had the day before. Once again however, she was rejected and had no place to stay. She had to choose whether to stay and be taken to a concentration camp or run. She chose the latter and tore off her yellow star and discarded her identification card which had a large letter "J" indicating she was Jewish and threw them into the burning rubble. Bella had no place to go to and survived the remainder of the war as a fugitive.

Bella later found shelter and work in a rather small and inconspicuous village. Despite her efforts to maintain a low profile, nearby residents were aware of her presence and thus alerted Nazi officials in the area. Consequently, the family with whom she had been staying told Bella to leave immediately and once again she was out on her own.

Bella quickly resumed her nomadic lifestyle. During this time, her wisdom teeth had grown in and the teeth were giving her so much pain. She had no insurance, so she could not find a dentist to pull her wisdom teeth out. Finally, she forced herself into a dentist's office and

threatened to kill herself if he did not take them out. The dentist agreed to take out the wisdom teeth out without any Novocain. On another day, while on board a train she and the rest of the passengers were suddenly forced to get off as directed by the SS. Bella contemplated letting the SS soldiers know she was Jewish so they could shoot her and thereby end her misery, but later reconsidered. Bella frequently considered revealing her true identity, knowing full well this would likely culminate in her death and furthermore ruminated as to the possibility of taking her own life.

On the eighth day of May, 1945, Nazi Germany officially surrendered to the Allied Forces and after three years of being on the run, Bella finally made her way back to Munich. In Munich, she found old family friends and they generously gave her a place to stay. Bella's years as a fugitive were over.

Shortly thereafter Bella was notified that a German lawyer was compiling the names of concentration camp survivors. Bella found the gentleman and asked if she could work for him in hopes of finding a member of her family. She compiled a list of names and birthdays of Dachau concentration camp survivors but was ultimately unsuccessful in finding any surviving family members; once again she was alone.

Bella had endured more pain and anguish than most could possibly imagine. Nevertheless, she refused to acquiesce to the internal urges of taking her own life and instead courageously vowed to struggle onward. She decided to begin a new chapter in her life. Bella met Sol, a former inmate at Dachau concentration camp and eventually fell in love with him. Through Sol, she got a job as a secretary at the American Jewish Distribution Committee (AJDC). While working there, she was elected to escort refugees to America.

Bella and Sol settled down in New York and married shortly thereafter. After ten years of marriage and the addition of two children to the family, Bella left Sol and moved her children to California. While in California, she met and married her second husband Lou, also a Holocaust survivor. Currently, they live happily in Palm Desert, California. Bella and her husband Lou are amateur ballroom dancers and have performed on stage and on television. Bella is a Senior Peer Counselor and leads weekly philosophical discussion groups at local retirement centers.

When asked about her feelings regarding the events that took place in Nazi Germany, she maintained, "Forgive! But never forget!" Those terrifying and tumultuous years, the loss of her mother, and the persecution of the Jewish people will always be in her memory. Her story and the stories of other Holocaust survivors should be told to remind us all that evil does exist. She shares her story so that we may prevent future atrocities from ever occurring and potentially save countless lives. Bella has contributed in the making of documentaries about the Holocaust as well as writing a book entitled *Echoes of the Past* to remind loved ones of the life she lived and the experiences, which shaped her into the person she is today.

Assemblymember Anthony J. Portantino

District 44

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Hava Ben-Zvi *Interviewed by Languyue (Lani) Luo*

Hava Ben-Zvi

By Languyue (Lani) Luo

When Push Comes to Shove

Words of hatred, words of destruction, and words of murder were spewing out of Adolf Hitler's mouth in the 1934 Nuremberg Rally; cameras flashed and people shouted with anger and awe, as this event took place. The power of words had never been so explicitly demonstrated as millions of people were persuaded that the Jews were of an inferior race and must be vanquished. The facts present themselves as proof that words can do it all, seeing that approximately six million people died. Why? Simply because they were Jewish. Innocence was driven to strength, positivity became courage, and love turned to respect. Hava Ben-Zvi's life was in great danger during the period of the Holocaust. Never could she have imagined how the horrors of the Holocaust would affect her childhood, let alone her future. Through her journey in Nazi-occupied Poland as a pre-teen to a teenager, Hava Ben-Zvi grew up to be a strong woman, full of confidence and wisdom.

She was born in Warsaw, Poland, into a family of four with mother, father, and older brother Michael. Though the family was not what people usually call a perfect family, the children were nonetheless cared for, educated, and loved. After the separation of her parents when Hava was 10 years old, her mother and brother left for Palestine, today Israel. Hava remained with her father in Warsaw. She missed her mother, but did not shed a single tear. She spent her days with her father, living a life of naïve fun and comfort under his protection. Hava was vaguely aware of what was happening to the Jewish community in Germany, but she was too young and hopeful to understand the fear that it had elicited in others.

Hava's father, on the other hand, was perfectly aware of the invasion of the Nazis. Thus, he quickly and quietly escaped Warsaw and moved to Eastern Poland with Hava in 1939 to seek the protection of the Russians. With her father's occupation as a teacher, the small family of two was able to find enough comfort to survive with little fear for two years. Unfortunately, Hitler's army invaded the Russian-occupied zone where Hava and her father lived in June of 1941. Under German rule, the Jews were forced to wear white armbands with the blue star of Zion in order to identify them easier. Hava, intelligent and swift, did not wear the armband because she knew that children under twelve years old were not required to take this action. Her father, however, did. Silently, he knew he was in grave danger, and knew he must act quickly before anything happened to his little girl. Therefore, he planned to send Hava to a Catholic convent, where Jewish children could be disguised and protected. Little did he know that his actions were too little and too late, as one morning he was suddenly taken away with fifty other Jews thinking they were being sent out to work. Hava waited with hope and anxiety for her father to come back, but he never did. She later found out that he was shot along with the other men.

"How could that happen?" thought Hava doubtfully. Unable to believe the terror, Hava somehow persuaded herself that he was still alive. A few weeks later she heard screams of terror from fearful Jews, thundering shouts from the German soldiers, and guns and machines of destruction rampaging all over the street. A weeping mother was trying to run away with her

children, but Hava did not follow in their steps. She knew they had no chance of survival. Their lives meant nothing to the German soldiers, and she understood, you did not ask the Germans for mercy.

After watching this scene of horror, Hava felt a drive to survive. She knew of all her father had done to protect her, and she must continue to carry out his efforts by never giving up. Faithfully, Hava escaped to her Christian friend Alicia to hide from the Germans. On that fateful day, as Hava was sitting on a bed with a cat on her lap, a soldier came in to inspect Alicia's house. While talking casually with the mother, the inspecting soldier asked "who is that little girl" sitting on the bed. Immediately, Hava's heart began pounding so hard it seemed the officer could hear, but she knew better. Hava kept her face calm and looked as if she was just bored. Nonchalantly, the mother simply replied: "she is ours," acting just as calm as Hava. Fortunately, Hava's demonstration of good façade saved her life, but it did not save others. The Jewish doctor who was tending Alicia's sick father was taken by the soldier and was quickly shot outside their doorstep. Seeing this, Alicia's father was anxious for Hava to leave. He could no longer risk the safety of his family. Hava knew that sheltering a Jew was punishable by death. She knew she had to leave her friend's home as soon as possible. Before she left, however, Alicia's mother gave her a coat and a shawl to keep her warm, but also to avoid any unwanted attention. In addition, Alicia also bestowed a cross necklace upon Hava, hoping to save her from persecution and to guide her to safety. Though turned away from the comfort of a home, Hava was deeply thankful for what Alicia's family had done for her.

Alone, this young girl silently trudged along the roads of Poland day after day and knocked on the doors of kind farmers who allowed her to stay for a day or a night. While she was doing so, she also fabricated a false identity to avoid death, telling people that she was from Moscow, Russia and that her parents had died in an air raid. Her anecdotes were obviously not believable enough. The farmers fed her, but had to ask her to leave after each stay, because they knew that hiding a Jew was dangerous and could imperil their own lives.

One day, a policeman came to see one of these farms and saw Hava. She had no doubt that this policeman would not show her any mercy. On the contrary, this policeman asked no questions about her origins, but simply told her to go to an orphanage close by where it was safer for Hava to live. Hava thought that the kindness shown to her by the friendly strangers was already enough, and never had she expected this to occur. But time was ticking, and Hava knew she should go.

As soon as she arrived at the orphanage, Hava was immediately welcomed with warm soup and a bed to sleep on. But the next day she was called to speak with the orphanage director, who informed her that he knew she was a Jew. Once more, kindness showed itself to Hava, as the director promised to take her in as an orphan. He would sign her in at a later date, but only after all the Jews of the city had already been destroyed, so it would not lead to any suspicions. Also, he told her that to make her false identity more believable, she must say that she was Polish instead of Russian, as she spoke Polish much better than Russian. And that is how Hava lived for the next two years till the age of fourteen, in the orphanage, blending in with other orphans, washing and cleaning along with other older girls.

A blond, blue eyed girl, she was able to stay protected, but rumors of her being Jewish were circulating around the orphanage. Finally the director sent her to a farm, so that the rumors might die down. Hava spent her time on the farm tending animals, working in the fields and gardening.

At the farm, she felt extremely lonely. She could not make friends as they might suspect her of being a Jew. She was just fourteen years old and hardly knew how to milk a cow. Although there was no lack of food and she was never hungry, Hava's stay at the farm exposed her to some of humanity's uncivilized qualities. She had to toil with work from morning to night, wear clothes infested with lice, deal with gossipers, and learn to get used to being called harsh names. And fear of betrayal was always there. She was silent, hopeful and determined to survive.

As each day passed, Hava began to hear news of the war coming to an end. At last in 1945, the German soldiers that occupied Poland began to disappear, symbolized by seeing the last German soldier on horseback riding away from the Village. Freedom seemed to be guaranteed. However, the sixteen-year-old Hava never had forgotten her family and where she came from. Thus, she set out to look for her mother in what was then Palestine. Hava immigrated into Palestine where Jewish immigration was prohibited by the ruling British government.

After many attempts to search for her long-lost mother, Hava decided to place an ad in a local newspaper and titled her ad "A Girl Looks For Her Mother." With her mother's name, her father's name, her brother's name, and her own name printed on the ad, her mother was reached and came to find her the day the newspaper was printed.

From that day on life, compared to those critical years of the Holocaust, seemed easy, knowing that she no longer had to fake her identity and avoid authorities. Without knowing Hebrew, Hava enrolled in high school, graduated, and went to teacher's college, so she could teach the many immigrant children who arrived in Israel after the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948. In 1950 she met her future husband, Ephraim Ben-Zvi, who was studying to be a chemical engineer.

Ephraim was trying to receive his Ph.D. degree and needed to move to California to attend the University of California at Davis. Hava came along with Ephraim and their four-year–old son without knowing that California would be her home from then on. She enrolled at the California State University of Los Angeles, and graduated with honors. Later she earned a Master in Library Science and became a librarian, a career she loved. As a librarian, Hava worked in public libraries, served for twenty seven years as the director of the Jewish Federation Council's Jewish Community Library of Los Angeles, and was the recipient of the Ezra Award for major contributions to Jewish education and knowledge in the community.

Today, Hava lives in her home in California while serving as a teacher, author, anthologist and translator. She has written two books: *Eva's Journey: A Young girl's True Story* and *The Bride Who Argued With God*: *Tales from the Treasury of Jewish Folklore.* She is at work today on a new book: *A Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Poland: An Anthology of*

Literature. The book is the saga of Jewish life in Poland in the mirror of literature, and will include stories, memoirs, eyewitness reports, letters, folktales and humor. It will serve as a tribute to the Jews of Poland.

Today she visits schools and libraries spreading the truth among students and readers about the Holocaust, to remember and prevent it from re-occurring. When asked if current media is exaggerating the brutality of the Holocaust, Hava replied that what the media is showing is an understatement, and that the media is protecting its audience from the real horrors.

Throughout Hava's life, she has learned many extraordinary lessons, even though many of them were not learned by choice. First, she has learned to be more careful with other people's feelings. Also, Hava has become a linguist, learning four different languages from Polish, Russian, and Hebrew to English. Though she has forgotten Russian, she is still able to comprehend it, and serve as an interpreter. But most important of all, Hava believes that humans have strengths that they never knew they had. "Somehow," reflects Hava, "I had resources I never knew I possessed." That is certainly true.

As a woman of strength and courage, Hava is a true believer that when push comes to shove, you find the resources to face reality and survive, preserving your humanity and integrity.

Assemblymember Curren D. Price, Jr.

District 51

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

Dorothy Greenstein *Interviewed by Yazmin Rubio*

Dorothy Greenstein

By Yazmin Rubio

What is in a Name

What is in a name? Dorothy, a common enough name, but can it define a person? How about Devorah, or Zofia? Hitler did not think so. Adolf Hitler, founder and leader of the Nazi Party, decided in WWII to remove the names of millions of people, those people were now distinguished by numbers. The stories of the millions who went to the camps built by Hitler are known by many, but what of those who never made it to the camps, those who were in hiding? What of their names? I'm going to tell you the story of a courageous woman and how she fights today to inform the public of those whose names never became numbers.

Devorah Kirszenbaum was born on December 10, 1930, to Jewish parents. She lived in Otwock, Poland, near the city of Warsaw. She was eight years old when she heard the first bomb hit Poland. Her father, a Rabbi, Judge, and Vet, was always ready to protect his nine children, seven girls, three of which were married, and two boys. He had already built trenches in the back yard and a sealed room as protection from the deadly gasses used during WWII. On September first, she saw the German soldiers marching into her town, and that was when the oppression started.

The next day, there were placards everywhere saying that Jewish children could not go to school. Shortly afterward they had to give up their radios, fur, and leather. After each loss she and many other Jewish people looked to her father. He was fondly remembered as a wise man. Every time something was taken he would say "we can live without it, what else can they do?" For a few short months everything was quiet, it seamed like he was right. That is when the ghetto was produced and they knew why everything had been quiet. The city of Otwock was a big city so they made three ghettos. She moved to the ghetto with her parents, three of her sisters, and her brothers. Her other two sisters were married and no longer in Poland and the last one went to a Warsaw ghetto. This is when Devorah had to risk her life for the survival of her family. In the ghetto they had a kitchen and bedroom to live in, with the mattresses and picnic table that they took. The Germans gave them rations of food and these rations were known as "food to die by, not to live by." Devorah's father realized that they had to get more food or else they were going to starve. This is when he looked to Devorah, and asked her to jump the ghetto fence and get food for her family. Devorah, as a child would be the least detected. For two and a half years she snuck out and bought food for her family outside the ghetto. The money for the food was provided by her sister Rachel, who jumped the fence to sell goods, from her store in the ghetto, to those she knew on the outside. One day her sister comes back with the news that they were going to be relocated.

Their wise father who was once an optimist, now became a pessimist. He told his girls that they must escape to Polish friends; he, his wife, and his sons could not escape because they could not speak Polish. They sent two of the girls to ask for help from tenants they had before. These two girls did not get the help they sought and were killed in the Treblinka death camp. Rachel was sent to the sergeant who told her about the scheduled relocation's home. Devorah

was sent to a reporter, whom they had known before. Devorah was sent back to the ghetto the next day, believing that it was all a lie. When she jumped the fence she saw soldiers everywhere and knew that it must have been true. Devorah found her parents who yelled at her to go back and find her sister Rachel. This time when she ran back she could not get out because she had to jump a different fence. In her desperation to get out, she did not see the German soldiers on either side of the fence. These soldiers saw her in her desperation and because she had light hair and blue eyes they thought she was Polish. One of them helped her over the fence.

Devorah went to the sergeant's home and found her sister there. They both were hidden under a bed when the German soldiers started finding Jews, hidden in trees and gardens, and shooting them. This is when the sergeant's wife asked them to leave because she was frightened, and advised them to hide in the outhouse. Neither the German soldiers nor their German Shepherd dogs would go near the outhouse because of the smell so they were safe for the night. The next day they took a train to another ghetto. This ghetto had no walls and no security so it was easy to get in. Her sister was hospitalized because she had sat on the hole in the outhouse for hours and Devorah had warts on her hands. The only way to cure the itch and eventually get rid of the warts was to urinate on her hands and that is what she did. Two weeks later the sergeant went to them and told them that the ghetto was going to be relocated. They left that ghetto and stayed in a barn for two days and two nights. The owner of the farm asked them to leave so they tried to take a train back to Otwock but because Devorah was shaking so much a woman accused her sister of helping a Jew. They got off the train and Rachel told Devorah that they had to separate. Rachel took Devorah to a labor camp, Karczew, where her married sister, Tofka, and her brother, Itzhak were held. She hid in that camp for two weeks. One morning when the German soldiers took German Shepherds to find any hidden Jews in the barracks she was found. Devorah had been hidden as if she was a pillowcase on the top bunk, in the corner of the building. The German Shepherd sniffed her and went up on his hind legs, but he did not bark. Her life was saved because the dog did not bark and therefore did not give her away. That day the person who was in charge of that barrack asked her to leave.

She went looking for farms and she found one where they kept her in the attic. Devorah heard shooting and yelling and she knew that they had come to relocate those in the work camp. She realized that she was really alone, she did not know if her sister and brother had escaped. She began to cry and the farmer's wife asked her to leave. She hid in the corn patch until the next day at noon, when a German Shepherd did bark. A Polish man with a German Shepherd found her in the corn patch and dragged her out. He was going to turn her in but the farmer's wife came out of her house and screamed at the man to let her go. Devorah was again asked to leave and she walked into the forest with nowhere to go and she began to cry for the second time. While walking in the forest she prayed to her father and the next morning she found herself in her city. She found a maid that worked for them before and asked her for help. She stayed with that woman for two weeks, hiding under the bed when they had visitors, until the maid asked her to leave because she was frightened. This is when she remembered where her married sister told her to go if she ever needed help. She started walking to the farm and when she was halfway there two men attacked her. They were going to rape her and she told them she had a disease and then they left her alone. She was eleven at the time. She arrived at the village and found the farm, and in it her sister, her husband and their brother. They were hidden in an extremely small cellar with little food, and this was when Devorah became Zofia.

Zofia Leszczynska was born three months after Devorah, and died three days later. Devorah was told by her sister to go to her city and ask the woman of the church to give her the birth certificate of a Polish child, and become a modest helper. Devorah walked to her city and arrived at the church, but the woman would not give her the birth certificate. Devorah then learned identity theft. She took a train and got off at the first stop after Warsaw. She asked where the cemetery was and in it found a child who was born around the time she was and died shortly afterward, Zofia. Devorah then went to the church and bought the birth certificate for twenty-five cents.

Zofia walked to Warsaw and became a modest helper. She kept her first job for two weeks then was asked if she was Jewish. Zofia left the next day and found work in the home of a female doctor with two children and a father in law. She worked for this woman for two and a half years. This was when the Polish uprising occurred, and she was elated in the belief that she was going to be liberated. She saw the Russians send rifles and the next day bullets. These bullets did not fit the rifles, and the Polish did not succeed in their uprising. The Germans took the Polish out of the city and proceeded to burn it. Everyone from the city was forced on a death march. They were starved because of the uprising and had to walk over those who could not go on. They saw people trampled over and dehydrated but could not help. They started to walk with their heads hanging, but not the doctor. She found a hospital where they were fed and given money to travel to another city, Krakow.

At Krakow she separated from the doctor and became a modest helper again. A short time later the Soviets liberated her. Her sister, Tofka came to get her and they tried to live in Poland again. This was made impossible because of all the prejudice and they eventually went to a displaced person's camp in the American zone of Germany. She finished high school and wanted to leave Germany so she traveled to Canada and married her husband, Avrom. This is when she became Dorothy Greenstein.

Dorothy Greenstein is now 78 and she moved to the United States after living in Canada for fifteen years. She has two children and volunteers at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. This woman who has changed her name three times and lost her parents, two of her sisters and a brother, tells the story of millions through hers alone. She has taught me that a name does not define a person, a person defines their name. It doesn't matter if you change a person's name or remove it, they are still a person and they deserve the chance to live.

Assemblymember Mary Salas
District 79

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Kurt Sax — *Interviewed by Michael Hice*
Ruth Goldshmiedova Sax — *Interviewed by Adriana Hice*

Kurt Sax

By Michael Hice

A Blessing

Kurt Sax was born in Vienna, Austria on August 14, 1922. One year later he moved to Stockerau, where he was raised by his grandmother and two uncles. As a young boy he learned to read English, French, and Latin which would be a very useful skill while seeking a way out of Europe in the dawn of war. He wrote a letter to all people with the last name Sax, spelled in any variation, asking them to get him out of the country before he could be taken by the Nazis. His letters reached a widow in a temple, whose friend was able to sponsor him and three other Jewish people from Germany.

When he first arrived in the United States in 1938 he felt very blessed by God that he was able to escape such devastation. Kurt recalls asking God to help him lose his accent, but not his sense of humor as he would use it to entertain himself by doing impressions of famous people.

He first lived in Baltimore for seven to eight months, where he worked at the Mt. Sinai Jewish Hospital before moving to Anderson, South Carolina. There he asked twenty-two merchants in a Jewish community for donations. He used those donations to open a newsstand with one of his uncles in 1939.

After running that business for three years, he moved to California in 1941. Within the next four years he became a stock broker and co-owner of Oskar's Grocery Market on Market Street.

In 1945 Kurt became a United States citizen. With a new sense of patriotism he signed up for the war effort but due to complications in his physical examination he was not able to serve and became a delivery person for the local newspaper.

In 1949 he married his wife Ruth and raised two wonderful daughters and has four beautiful grandchildren. Today Kurt is almost 87 years old and has been happily married for 60 years. When asked if there was anything he would do differently in life, he simply says that he has not lived with any regrets and that if he had to do it over then he wouldn't change a thing.

Ruth Goldshmiedova Sax

By Adriana Hice

Endearment

Ruth Goldshmiedova Sax was born in Moravsky, Sumperk in Northern Moravia of the Czech Republic on July 6th, 1928. She was the only child born to Erna and Oskar Goldshmiedova. Growing up, Ruth's father was a traveling salesman and her mother was in charge of a factory showroom. The family lived in Northern Moravia until Ruth's sixth birthday. It was at that time the family would be relocated to Brno in Southern Moravia.

She recalls her life before the war as being beautiful. Everything changed after the invasion of the Germans, which was when life for Jewish people became very difficult. Ruth attended a non-segregated public school before the invasion by the Germans. She also remembers when her father lost his job. The family stayed in an apartment which was owned by the same factory that employed her mother.

Shortly after the war began, Hitler ordered all people of Jewish descent to wear the Star of David to separate them from non-Jewish people. All Jewish people were rounded up and put into schools for three days and transported by train at night to Terezin, which became a gathering place for Jewish people to be shipped to other places.

Ruth and her family were then transported from the ghetto to Auschwitz. Once in the concentration camp, life for the Goldshmiedova family got much worse. Ruth, along with her mother, was separated from the rest of the family. Ruth said that life inside the Terezin camps was very sad; they lived in a very small space with several others.

They were given very little to eat at the concentration camp in Terezin – usually bread, dumplings and horse meat. Ruth's mother worked in the kitchen where she had to cook for over 3,000 people every day. Her mother was forced to wear a black dress with an X painted on its back to make it more difficult to escape from the working camp in Oederan (Death March), an ammunition factory that was once a thread factory. Once a week, the Nazis would repaint the X on the back of her mother's clothing so it wouldn't fade away. Ruth's father's job was in Terezin and his job was to disinfect the entire concentration camp.

Ruth worked on the outside of the camp. The outside workers wore striped suits so that they were easily identified. Their uniforms also prevented them from running away. In Terezin, Ruth's job was to work in the children's garden planting vegetables. The Nazis oversaw her and the others as they worked in the garden. If anyone did not cooperate or tried to eat the vegetables while they worked, they were punished by the Nazis. Ruth says if it wasn't for the camaraderie that existed in the camp among the Jewish people, she doesn't know how she would have gotten through the day. They created songs, told stories of the past, took care of each other, and dreamed of the day of liberation.

In the midst of Ruth's time in Auschwitz, Ruth and her mother were transferred to Oederan (Death March) for two weeks and then back to Terezin. It was in Terezin that the Russians came and liberated them.

Once freed, it was difficult for her to get home; bridges were broken and roads were unclear, and what normally would have taken and hour and a half took two and one half days. It continued to be difficult for Jewish people after the liberation. Racism continued in certain areas.

Ruth met her husband, Kurt Sax, before the war when she was seven years old and he was thirteen. Fortunately, he was able to escape Europe before the war. He contacted Ruth from America after the war to see if anyone was left in their town, and this was how they reconnected. In order for Ruth to get out of the Country, Mr. Sax had to return to Brno and marry Ruth there. After their arrival in the United States, Mr. Sax was offered a job, and that was what brought them to Chula Vista.

Assemblymember Lori Saldaña

District 76

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Gussie Zaks *Interviewed by Leah Schnure*

Gussie Zaks

By Leah Schnure

Gussie Zaks was born in Klobuck, Poland, a town she describes as small but full of people. The youngest of seven children, Gussie had four sisters and two brothers. Her father owned a butcher shop where her mother helped out where she could. Gussie described herself as always being very small and skinny and she deems it a miracle that anyone survived through the Holocaust, let alone herself.

Poland was a very poor country, and Gussie recalled that most people went to bed hungry at night. "We were very lucky," Gussie said, pointing to her father's profession as a butcher as being advantageous. Gussie recalled going to school and getting help from her sisters and friends, but she attributed any knowledge she has to her mother. "My mother would sit down and explain things to me," she said. "Anything I know I owe to my mother."

Poland was very anti-Semitic as Gussie remembered. In her town, the Jewish men were very active in the synagogue while the woman's place was mostly at home. Tradition was very important and family was central to daily life—Gussie's father would not start dinner until everyone was at the dinner table.

When Gussie was 9 years old her eldest sister was married, and by age 10 she was an aunt. People got married very young then, Gussie explained. At 3 years old, the child was taken along with Gussie's sister to a camp where Gussie assumed they were both killed. "The Germans would separate the babies from their mothers, but many of the mothers would not let their children go alone." Many mothers died along with their babies.

As Germany gained power during Gussie's childhood, many began to worry. Gussie's mother, who spoke German, was not concerned since Poland was already intolerant of Jews. "Germans were thought to be very intelligent people. My mother would tell me not to worry. 'Germany couldn't be any worse than this,' my mother would tell me; but she was very wrong."

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland. The educated people of Poland—doctors, business owners, and educators—were all picked up by the Nazis and taken to camps immediately out of fear that the educated would resist and cause an uprising against the German occupiers.

One day, when Gussie was out cleaning the streets with her sister, her entire family was taken by the Nazis to a camp called Treblinka. Left behind, the two girls were horrified. They could not believe that the Germans had come and taken everyone. It was not long before the two girls were also taken to Treblinka. Gussie described her sister, Regita, as a tomboy, very strong and sure of herself. Later, Regita escaped from Treblinka and went into hiding. Years later, while Regita was still hiding with other escapees, the woman who had been hosting them was talking with neighbors about the coming end to the war. The neighbors had remarked that there would not be any Jews left after what the Nazis had done, but the woman corrected them and told of those that had been hiding with her. Within hours, the Gestapo arrived and killed Gussie's sister, along with the others in hiding—three days before the liberation.

When Gussie was taken to Treblinka, she stood as one of three thousand women. For a month, the women waited, lining up day after day to be inspected. Finally, the day came for the Nazis to select who would go to a work camp and who would be sent to a death camp. Gussie, being only 13 years old and very small, was discouraged, believing that the Nazis would send her to a death camp; she lost all hope and began to cry. Two of the neighboring women told her to stop crying, and when the Nazi officers would pass by them, the women would lift Gussie up so that her head was on-level with theirs. Amongst all of the crowded bodies, the officers only looked at heads. After five hours of waiting, and being repeatedly lifted by her kind neighbors, Gussie was chosen as one of a thousand women to be sent to Noizaltz, a women-only open work camp. The others were sent to death camps.

Gussie spent three and a half years at Noizaltz where women worked in fields or in factories. "There was food, but never enough," Gussie recalled. In the camp, the women were not given information about the progress of the war. Gussie worked in the fields, and because she was young and small, she worked very quickly, which pleased her overseer. One day when food was being unloaded, Gussie saw a sack of potatoes roll off a cart and into some bushes. Gussie was the only person who saw it; she decided that she would return for the potatoes later when nobody was watching. When it came time for her to retrieve the potatoes, she became very excited and began running in the wrong direction. She neared the exit of the camp before she became aware of where she was, and she stopped. Officers began shooting at her, and she was grabbed by an SS officer. Gussie knew that she would be killed; all of the women she shared living quarters with said their goodbyes. However, her overseer, knowing that Gussie was a good worker, intervened and had her life spared.

As the war began to turn and Germany started to decline in power, the Nazis began a death march from Noizaltz. For twelve weeks, the women from the camp were forced to march from village to village, and each day bodies were left behind. Escaping was not an option; the women who tried were immediately killed by the Nazi officers. During the twelve week march, the women did not change clothes or shower. The only way Gussie survived was by stealing food from villagers as they marched from one village to another. Gussie and another girl, who spoke very good German, would pose as young German children and would go to houses in the villages, begging for food at front doors.

At the end of the twelve week march, the women found themselves at Flossenbourg. The women were ordered to line up, and the Nazi soldiers told the women they would be getting a shower. The women panicked. They had heard stories about the gas chambers and how the Nazis would tell prisoners that they would be taking showers when, in fact, they were going to be gassed. The women were stripped, shaved, and packed into a small room with faucets in the ceiling. Miraculously, water came out. After the shower the women were given clothes that had been stripped from dead bodies, and after putting on their vestments they were crammed onto cattle trains. Gussie recalled that in her cattle car there were 90 girls. For three days they traveled on the train without food or water. "There was no use being hungry. There was no food to be hungry for." Many died during the journey and when the cars were finally opened, bodies were left behind. The women had arrived at the Bergen-Belsen camp in northwestern Germany.

Gussie recalled that Bergen-Belsen was very different from Treblinka or Noizaltz; this camp was full of thousands of people, men and women, although they were kept separated. "Everyone was 80% dead, 20% alive," she said. There was not a single empty barrack, in fact most of the barracks were overflowing with occupants. "We had 970 girls living in one room," Gussie said, recalling her living conditions. Prisoners were rarely fed and many died from starvation. "We never knew when we would get food, so we lived like animals."

Gussie recalled a story about the barrack next to hers. It was filled with Gypsies, and one day they were given soup by the soldiers. The gypsies put the soup down and started dancing; Gussie could not believe that the gypsies were dancing instead of eating, and she decided to take some soup for herself. Grabbing her bowl, Gussie headed for the soup, but before she could reach it, a man ran up from the men's side of the camp, desperate for food. In front of her, Gussie could see the man with his bowl, but suddenly, she saw blood running down the side of his face and neck. Gussie could not understand where the blood was coming from until, looking behind the bleeding man, she saw a German soldier, his gun still raised. The man had been shot by a soldier. Gussie threw her bowl down and put her hands up in surrender. "Surely, if that man was killed for trying to eat the soup, so would I," she remembered, "but the soldier just looked at me and started to laugh and laugh. He thought it was funny!" Gussie was spared, but could not comprehend why the soldier had killed the other man and not her.

The prisoners were forced to get up at 5:00 a.m. each morning at the camp to be counted by the Nazis. One morning, Gussie had lost the will to survive and would not leave the barrack. Lying on the floor, Gussie did not want to live under the awful conditions any longer. Another woman who lived in the barrack told Gussie to get up and go to the counting, but Gussie did not move. The woman grabbed Gussie, forcing her to get up and go out to be counted. If Gussie had stayed in the barrack, she would have been killed.

In 1944, the Bergen-Belsen camp was liberated. Gussie, then 18 years old, recalled "A military man told us in English over the speaker that we were free, but nobody spoke English so we did not understand." The prisoners were given water to drink, and they began to understand what was happening; the war was over.

Despite the liberation, it was still too late for many of those living at the camp. The prisoners had not been given water for a month and many died from Typhus and other diseases even after being freed. Gussie was taken to a hospital and shared a room with three other women. Gussie fell asleep after arriving at the hospital, and when she woke up, the other three women were gone. She asked the nurse in Polish what had happened to the other women, and Gussie was told that they had died. "It did not make sense to me that they died and I was still alive. Why me and not them?"

The doctor at the hospital recommended that Gussie go to a Red Cross camp in Sweden to get well, but Gussie wanted to stay to find her family. The doctor told her that she could go to Sweden and if she wanted to return, he would keep a spot open for her. Convinced she had nothing to lose, Gussie went to Sweden. Gussie recalled that her time in Sweden was wonderful.

The people taking care of Holocaust victims had been trained to treat them very well. While recuperating, Gussie's aunt who lived in Belgium found out that Gussie was alive in Sweden. Her aunt immediately sent Gussie tickets to move to Belgium to live with her. At first Gussie did not want to go, but she was convinced by Red Cross workers to go and at least visit her aunt; if she did not like it there she could always return to Sweden.

Gussie went to Belgium and immediately felt at home. Her aunt had her own family, but made sure that Gussie felt loved and welcome. "My aunt would tell her daughter that she did not love me more than her, but that I had lost my family and needed to feel loved too. She treated us the same, except she would leave fruit and things in the closet just for me. She was wonderful." Healing took a long time for Gussie, but it happened with the help of her aunt and family. "After all of this, I love people. I love to help everybody."

Gussie met her first husband in Belgium; she was 20 and "needed to get married." Her husband, however, did not treat her well, so she divorced him and moved to New York. In New York, Gussie worked in a factory. One of her colleagues there offered to help teach her English, and every day in the factory he would give her English lessons while they worked.

A boy that she had met when she was at Treblinka saw her in a relative's home movie in Los Angeles where he then lived and recognized her. Gussie described their original childhood affections as "puppy love" when they had been in the camp together. He contacted her and convinced her to move to Los Angeles. "He was so different from my ex-husband, very good to me and very kind." They married, and Gussie says they were always together after that moment.

Gussie is still baffled that she survived the war. There were several instances where, in her opinion, she should have died, but something prevented it: the helpful neighbors who lifted her to their height in the selection line, the roommate who pulled her from the floor, and the restraint of a Nazi soldier. "It's a miracle. God wanted me to be here."

Gussie is very active in the San Diego community. She is President of her Temple, Sisterhood, and the New Life Club, a club devoted to Holocaust survivors and their families. Gussie also travels all over the county, giving talks at school campuses on her experiences during the Holocaust.

Assemblymember Cameron Smyth

District 38

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Margot Webb

Interviewed by Jamie Arnold, Christina Callas, Ashley Juhasz, Justin McLance, Amanda Scholl, Varoujan Vartanian, Neev Zaiet, Tai Zaiet

Acknowledgements

Bill Bolde, Principal, Saugus High School

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Canyon High School

Golden Valley High School

KHTS AM-1220

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Margot Webb

The following biographical information was obtained from an interview conducted with Margot Webb, a Holocaust Survivor and resident of the Santa Clarita Valley. The Santa Clarita Valley is part of the 38th Assembly District, represented by Assemblyman Cameron M. Smyth. The interview was conducted on Tuesday, February 17, 2009, in the library at Saugus High School in Saugus, California, from 6:00pm – 8:00pm. The interview was conducted by the following students from four area high schools: Christina Callas, Justin McLance, Amanda Scholl and Varoujan Vartanian (Saugus High School); Neev Zaiet and Tai Zaiet (Valencia High School); Jamie Arnold (Canyon High School); Ashley Juhasz (Golden Valley High School). Also in attendance was Bill Bolde, Principal, Saugus High School, who generously donated the use of his school library, as well as parents of some of the students, and a recording engineer from local radio station, KHTS AM-1220, who recorded the interview session. Diana Sevanian, a local columnist for Santa Clarita newspaper, The Signal, who played an instrumental part in this year's search to locate Margot Webb, was present to record the session for print media.

Margot: During the Nazi time when I was still a little girl, my parents had to give up their business and their house and we moved to a small town called Arnstadt, which is in the middle of the forest in Germany and near a concentration camp called Buchenwald. And then we lived with my grandparents, my mother's parents, I just loved them to death, and I absolutely loved going to visit there and when I found out we were going to live there permanently I was so innocent and didn't know what was going on so I was really excited to live there. I was an only child…my parents actually wanted to have more children but because of the Nazis and because life was so dangerous at the time they didn't have anymore. I was the only one and when I did something wrong, I couldn't say my brother did it or my sister did it…I was the only one to blame. My father owned a department store similar to Macy's and my mother was a social lady, you know. We lived in a big house and we had servants…upstairs servants and downstairs servants and I had a nanny…and it was a very strange sort of life, I think, you know, being brought up by a nanny. And my mother was quite jealous of the nanny sometimes, and if I showed too much love for them she'd say "Okay, this one has to be fired". But my grandparents also lived in Halle the big city where I was born. My grandmother died a normal death of a heart attack before that whole thing got so horrible, but my grandfather on my father's side couldn't get out of Germany during the Nazi time and he moved to a nearby city called Leitzig. The Nazis took everything away…money, jewelry, houses, businesses, everything. He was poor and he lived with a woman who used to work in the department store which he and my father owned. They were both starving to death, so they decided one day that the best thing to do was to commit suicide. They shot each other on the count of three…each one had a gun and they went one, two, three and he shot her and she shot him. I didn't know that until about three years ago. I was in Germany and they were honoring the house that we used to live in with all those servants, which is now a youth hostel so young people can go there for about five dollars a night with a meal included. I was there along with the mayor of the city and I started to cry because it was the first time I had ever seen it again since I was a child. I said, "I can't stay here I just have to leave". It was a snowy and icy day and I walked down the steps but the Mayor came after me as I was leaving. "Wait, wait, wait, I have something to tell you," he said. "Did you know your grandfather committed suicide?" I almost slipped on the steps. It was not a good choice or a

good time to tell me that, but that's how I found out. What else can I tell you about my family? My maternal grandparents, whose house we moved to in a small town in the forest, were the most wonderful, warm and fuzzy people ever. My grandmother invented fairytales for me and she always held me on her lap. There was a big fireplace going in the winter time and she was a kind person. I still think of her as an angel.

My father was an atheist but my parents would maybe go to temple on the high holidays. My grandfather, I don't think ever went to temple…I think perhaps he was an atheist as well. But the interesting thing is, when my father died here in San Francisco as an old man, a few days just before he died he said the most important Jewish prayer of all, the Shema. We didn't even know he could know anything about Hebrew. The Shema is a prayer that says "you're the only god we believe in, there's only one god". The idea is that people should listen and not talk so much, so I don't know what my father really believed at the end. My other grandparents, in the little town to which we traveled Arnstadt, went to temple. My grandfather was a religious man, not orthodox but conservative. There's three ways of being a Jew. There is the reformed, where it's almost like going to church, it's not much difference; the conservative, which involves lots of Hebrew and lots of rules; and the orthodox. I never knew anything much about them. But the temple that we went to with my grandparents, the men and women were separated: the men were downstairs, the women upstairs. What do you think the women were doing while the men were praying? Talking…the whole time. But unfortunately, you know about Kristallnacht ("The Night of Broken Glass"). During that time our temple was burned and I was truly upset. I thought it was a holy place and there's no way that the Nazis would ever do anything to it. I was wrong. When I went back to Germany a few years later, the teenagers had gone into the archives and had found the architectural plans for the temple. They built one about this big, [gestures with hands] exactly according to scale without any help. It was in the city hall, just absolutely beautiful.

Well, yes, my grandmother and grandfather celebrated holidays. Chanukah, of course, with all of the presents! And we, of course, did the most important holiday, which is Yom Kippur, a day where we don't eat and we think about people that we may have hurt and we either call them or go up to them and apologize. I have one friend with whom I went to Germany awhile ago and we ended up not being friends when we came back. Two years ago on Yom Kippur I went up to her and I said "Let's be friends again", so I felt I did the right thing. She said no [laughs] but that's okay. So those are the holidays we celebrated and of course on Friday night we had Sabbath and we lit the candles and had a yummy dinner.

Before the war, in Arnstadt with my grandparents, there were only two Jewish children left including myself. The other one was a girl who was thirteen, and before all this really started, I had nothing but Christian friends. My best friends were Christians, but then I was asked to leave school. There was one day when all the Jewish children were asked to leave school and not to return. When I left school one of my girlfriends, Rosemarie, came out without her coat or hat on when it was freezing cold and snowing. She hid behind a building and she said, "I want you to know that I'll always love you, and one day we'll get together again…you know, this can't last forever". And I went to America and she…who knows? The second time I went back to Germany I couldn't find my way around that little town of Arnstadt so I took a taxi. I said to the taxi driver, "Oh just a minute, see that house…that's where my best girlfriend Rosemarie used to

live", and he said, "Oh, her, I know who that is". I got all excited I thought, "Oh boy, I'm going to see her", but he said, "I have to tell you she left only yesterday…she lives in Australia now and she came for her mother's funeral…she was 103." He continued, "Her father is still alive in an old people's home…would you like to see him?" I agreed, and when I arrived I saw all these old Nazis were sitting around. I was really afraid, but we went up to his room, he was in bed, in his late nineties and he looked at me and he said, "Oh, my God, there's my baby, Margot!" How he recognized that, I mean do I look like a baby? [laughs]. So, that was it, just that other girl in the town. She and I didn't click; she was thirteen and I was ten..

When I was about six I saw these huge flags start to come up. The Germans had enormous flags that went from the top of buildings to the bottom, like five, six story buildings. They would drape whole buildings in red flags with a swastika surrounded by white. The swastika is really a thing that comes from India. It's Sanskrit, the dead language of India and it means peace. Hitler didn't know that; there are many things he didn't know but that was one of them. With the flags I saw pictures of Hitler. Even at age six I thought, "What a face! What eyes!" and I was frightened. I also noticed the difference in my parents. They were very tense and as the years went by and I got to be nine, ten, I knew they had secrets. They would always smile at me in sort of a phony way and then as soon as I left the room they had to talk. I didn't realize that while they were whispering they were making plans to leave Germany, and had no idea who the Nazis really were until they accosted me.

Then came the day when I couldn't stand it anymore, when I knew my grandparents, my aunt and uncle, my mother and father had too many secrets. We had one housekeeper left in the house and she saw me trying to listen at the keyhole. We don't have keyholes anymore, but back then we lived in a house that was built in 1450 before the time of Columbus. This house had walls six feet thick, big heavy doors and a key in every single door, and there was a little hole that you could put your ear to and hear what the people inside were saying. I tried to hear what my grandparents and my parents were saying because I was really worried the way they were acting. The housekeeper came and she said, "What do you think you're doing?" I told her I thought something was wrong and that nobody was telling me anything. She said, "Nobody told you about the Nazis…nobody?" I replied, "Aren't they just Hitler's soldiers? What do they have to do with me?" And she said, "I don't think it's up to me to tell you but I'll talk to your grandmother about it". And shortly after my family finished meeting, my grandmother came and said, "Would you like me to tell you another story?" I desperately want to know, and when she told me about the Nazis I became angry. My grandmother asked me to come into the room where the whole family was and my father spared me nothing. He said, "The Nazis hate Jews, they hate disabled people, they hate gypsies, they hate homosexuals and they're trying to get rid of us and they're willing to kill us, and so we have to make plans to leave Germany. The reason we've been planning things is because I've gotten permission to come to the United States and you and your mother and everybody else will follow." I wasn't satisfied with that and I said, "How could it be that Hitler knows who's Jewish and who isn't?" He told me about the Gestapo, the secret police and how they listened to everything, how neighbors turned in their other neighbors, how kids even turned in their parents. They could say, "I heard my father say something against Hitler," and the father would be arrested. Everybody told the Gestapo everything and he said that's how they know who's Jewish and who isn't. And shortly after that, every Jewish female was given the middle name of Sarah. My name is Margot Sarah Webb; my

mother's name was Ilse Sarah Lewin. All Jewish boys and men were named Isaac as a middle name and these names were the one other way they could tell. I was ten, almost eleven during that time.

There weren't any ghettos in Germany. The ghettos were in Poland and places like that, other countries. The Jewish people in Germany were so close with the other people. My father, for example, was in World War I. He was a soldier for the Germans and he won the highest award that you could get as a soldier, the Iron Cross, similar to the American Purple Heart. He didn't get it for such bravery as you might think. He was walking with his infantry and thought he smelled rotten apples. When he pointed this out, his commander realized the smell was instead poisonous gas, and instructed the men to put on their masks. My father's "bravery" was only smelling what he thought were rotten apples.

We were forced out of the house in Halle because the Nazis had already taken over my family's department store. They had taken the house and that's why we lived with my grandparents and we knew that we had to leave…we knew it…and things happened that were really horrible. For example, one day I was going to go to school and my father said, "I have something to tell you before you go to school. Do you remember your math teacher, Mr. Stern?" And I said, well, of course, I just saw him yesterday in school, why wouldn't I remember him? I was getting really nervous and angry seemingly for no reason. But my father said, "This morning the Nazis caught him and they made him run in a circle over and over and over again in the snow." The man had a heart problem and he'd fall down and they'd pick him up again, and they'd say, "Stop falling down and run!" This went on for about half an hour and finally he fell down dead…and his wife watched the whole thing out of a window and she was screaming for help but nobody came. I was really scared to go to school that day, because I thought, is he still lying there dead in the street? But that was also the day I was told not to return to school…that a Jewish child could no longer get an education there.

There was a parade almost every day of Nazis and the radio was blaring with Hitler's awful voice. All the Nazi leaders were constantly on the radio saying that we were…the Germans were…the word in German is "Ubermensch"…on top…better than any other nation…better than any other people. They called themselves Aryans and they were purebred. You had to be blonde and blue-eyed and athletic, and that was the ideal German person. The mass media made it very clear that people with brown eyes and brown hair weren't very much liked. Interestingly, Hitler had brown hair and brown eyes. There were no ghettos, however. Kristallnacht was the night when they arrested every Jewish man in Germany and my grandfather was arrested. We lived in a three-story house at that time - that old house I was talking about - and I heard the Nazis down below saying, "We still have to get him." They mentioned him by name and my mother thought I was just dreaming. In a few seconds, there was a knock on the door and then kicking on the door. These three Nazis walked in with billy clubs, and my grandmother ran down the steps and she asked, "What do you want?" They said, in so many words, "Shut up," and took the Billy club and hit her across the back. Then my grandfather came… and he kind of knew he was going to be arrested that night. He was already in a coat. They grabbed my grandfather, shoved him in a truck that was outside of the house and took him to the local police station. There were other Jewish men sitting there, and my grandfather started to chant a prayer. The Nazis said that ifyou

continue to do that, we'll take the billy club, put your hands on your knees and hit your hand every time you start another song. Well, he did it all night long and when he came home, the next morning his hands were swollen. I was crying and he said, "You know, we need to have breakfast, just you and I." The next day we did, and the window was open. I didn't notice that, and I said, "Oh God, will the Nazis arrest you again?" and he said, "Oh no, they're all cowards." Well, there was an SS officer outside. They were the elite officers, the best, the tallest, the most handsome, and the most cruel. He overheard my grandfather say that, and through the window, he shouted, "Pack your bags! You're going to a concentration camp right now…and while we're at it, your brother can go, too!" So my grandfather and grandmother packed a suitcase and he was taken away to a concentration camp named Buchenwald. He stayed there for two weeks, but because he had money, he could buy his way out. Later my grandparents went to Amsterdam to escape, but it didn't work. They were picked up and taken to another concentration camp called Westerbork. From there, they were taken to another concentration camp, a death camp, called Sobibor. They were in a death march, where you had to walk through the snow…no shoes, just newspaper or whatever you could find. My grandmother collapsed, so one of the Nazis got really upset because it was almost outside of…they had just started their death march…they dragged her back and my grandfather as well, which is kind of amazing…back to Sobibor, and the next day they were gassed to death and burned in those ovens.

In terms of leaving our home, we obtained visas to come to the United States. We went to Berlin - my mother and I - to meet with the American Consul, but I found out later that those visas were not meant for my mother or for me. They were meant for my grandparents, and my grandparents had given up their lives. We left with the visas and packed our things. Our furniture went with us, and my grandparents' furniture, too, because they had still hoped that someday they could come. I didn't want to come to the United States. I wanted to stay in my own country. I wanted to stay with my own language. I swore I wouldn't speak English, ever, ever, ever, never...so for one year, I didn't talk. And I had an uncle who said to my mother, "You have to be more strict with her. Let's send her to a summer camp for four weeks." I said, "Fine, but I won't talk. I don't care, you can send me any place!" I got to the camp and I wasn't going to say a word…but I had to use the bathroom. (laughs) That was my first English: "Where is the ladies' room?" And when I got back from four weeks from the summer camp, I spoke English just the way I do now. Oh, God…that was, boy… 1940-something…God, am I old! Oh, God… (laughs)

Before I came to the United States, the Nazis had invaded Poland, so the war had started. They also invaded Czechoslovakia, which is now the Czech Republic…and then Amsterdam, which my grandparents didn't know. Coming aboard the ship, we got to the harbor where the ship was and an SS Officer grabbed my mother and said, "What's your name?" and she said, "Ilse Lewin," and he said, "We were looking for you, you're a spy. We were exactly looking for you!" And they dragged her off to a custom house. I stood there in the snow all alone, and I didn't know if they were going to kill her or if we were going to get to go to America. Were they going to take me to a concentration camp? My mother came out after about 45 minutes, and she looked absolutely horrible. The same SS officer said to me, "You…you come in the custom house now," and he said, "Unbelievable, these Jews - the mother wouldn't show us the document she was hiding. She's clearly a spy, but she must have given them to her daughter. She doesn't care if her daughter dies as long as she can go on living." They said, "Do you have anything with you from anybody else?" and I said, "Yes, I have a handkerchief from my grandmother." And they said,

"You know exactly what we want to hear…we want to see the papers." I answered, "What papers?" I had a new coat on that my grandmother had made for me with really shiny buttons on it, so first, they tore the buttons off, then they took my coat off. Next, they tore my dress. I was naked in front of them, and I was a little girl. I was almost twelve at that point and I was confused, standing here naked. They looked to see if I had some secret documents under my arms - and other places. Of course, they didn't find any, so they told me to get dressed and leave. I was so upset that I fell on the ice and cut my knee open. It was bleeding, and my mother said, "Just never mind that, let's go get on the ship now." We climbed up the gangplank up to the deck and my mother said, "Look down there at how small the Nazis look. Just look how tiny they are." And I looked, and there was a woman trying to get up the gangplank in a red coat and a red hat, and all of a sudden I hear a shot…and she lay there dead. Her blood just flowed out and mingled with the blood from my knee. They had found the real spy…and she had used my mother's name…so they found her with all her documents on her…That was my goodbye to Germany.

It was awful to me. Who was coming now? One day, the Nazis again pounded on our door and they came in. That was the day that they collected all the jewelry from Jews. My mother had some beautiful jewelry, so did my grandmother and they took everything. Not just from our family, but from all Jewish families…they just stole it. They didn't ask me and I felt sort of left out. I'm something, too… I had a little coral bracelet, and asked, "Do you want this too?" The Nazis answered, "Oh, no, that's just a piece of junk." They said, "Do you have anything you like a lot?" and I had a little horse that my grandfather had given me in a stall. It was in the stalls behind the house, and the one Nazi said, "You know, I would really, really like to see your horse and pet it. Is that okay?" I said, "Sure, of course." And we went out there, and he looked at the horse and he shot it and killed it. I watched the horse just shaking for a few minutes and that was that. So daily life was no daily life - you never knew who was going to be killed, who was going to be beaten, what was going to happen. Yes, I'm still afraid to be alone in the house, you know, when I hear noises. We have a two-story townhouse and if I'm upstairs and it's nighttime and my husband isn't home, I think I just heard something. For years I slept with a knife under my pillow. I didn't realize how stupid that is because if some man comes with a gun and overpowers me, what am I going to do with that knife under my pillow? No time to stab him (laughs) There are peculiar little neurotic habits that I got from that.

On the ship going to America, that was an eight day trip…and there was an African-American lady with her five year old son. She had been a diplomat in Germany and was going back to the United States. Her little boy spoke English and German, because he had been living in Germany. My mother said, I want you to go to him everyday, converse with him. He'll talk to you in English and you'll earn a little bit of English. As I told you, I refused to speak English, so I said in German to him, "If you want to play with me, you're going to speak German." We became fast friends… it was my first experience with an African-American person. Of course, it was so great, I was hoping to meet lots and lots of African-Americans…who spoke German (laughs). When we arrived, we had to go through Ellis Island and a friend of my father's picked us up. We spent two days in New York and then we moved to the town where we lived for six miserable years: Erie, Pennsylvania. I could not believe that anything that ugly could exist on the face of the world. (group laughs) My God, people were gossiping, people knew your business. They looked at me like I was some sort of object from a museum…They all said, "We speak German,"

and they would say, “Sprechen Sie Deutsch?” You know, this is the one sentence everybody knows…”Do you speak German?” I never knew what to say to them…What, so what…What? I hated it. It was a town with absolutely no culture. I sat there in school and I thought I learned all this before in fifth grade, in sixth grade, in seventh grade…I finally went to the Board of Education all by myself and I told them - this was after my summer experience - by that time I was speaking English. I said I can’t stand it anymore. For three years I’ve been in school, and I have learned nothing…zero…so, they put me in ninth grade and I skipped two years and from then on, it was great. I gave my parents so much trouble about hating that town and my father supported me totally because he was an intellectual, and he just hated Erie as much as I did. My mother loved it. She made girlfriends here and there. Finally, a cousin of mine from California came and said, “You know, if you don’t do something about this child and her temper tantrums, I think maybe she needs either to see a psychiatrist. You need to move to San Francisco.” We moved to San Francisco…and I loved it…just wonderful…I thought, what a country this is. And I have not been back in Erie.

The Nazis were all beasts, one and all. When I went back to Germany to talk to the children whose parents had been Nazis or maybe the grandparents had been Nazis, I started to talk to them and read them my book, which was called Shadows at Noon, which was translated into German. When that happened, a lot of people came up to me and would say, “We weren’t Nazis. Honestly, we were not the ones, we always felt for the Jews. Please believe me.” I didn’t. Then I met a woman who was a social worker and a theatrical person, and she said, let’s make your book into a play. And she did! I came back to Germany to see the play and it was absolutely fantastic and all these people who sat there…I knew that at least fifty-percent of them had to have been Nazis at one time or another…felt really bad…One person actually came up to me and said, “Yes, I was a Nazi, but we were sort of forced to be. We were supposed to be in the Hitler Youth,” which was like Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts here. The difference is they programmed them to be Nazis when they were little. They said, “What could we do? If we didn’t join the Hitler Youth our parents would’ve been arrested.” And so the last time I was in Germany was December (2008)…They made an audio book of my book in German…I brought you this (shows book)…You can pass it around…You can’t listen to it because it’s all in German. Seventy-two people of the town of Arnstadt took place in it, adults and children. Somebody had to play me, somebody had to play Rosemarie, my friend, and so on. They made this thing - this is the house, when you take it in your hand, you’ll see it…this is the house, that old house that we lived in. The artist who made this put a Nazi bird over it to show how the Nazis sort of overpowered us. The name of the book in German is Shadows Over the Christopherus…The reason it’s named Christopherus is because the house was called the house of Christopherus. As I said, it was a four-story house and there was a big St. Christopher painted on the walls, who is supposed to protect travelers. And there’s a little picture of me at age eight, there. At the same time that they did this, these ex-Nazis made this audiobook. When they opened it up, they had a big show…they played parts of it on the stage, they had me interviewed in front of three hundred people. The mayor of the town was there and gave a speech saying, “Please, I’m so sorry what happened to all the Jews. I’m so sorry!” First, he gave me a big bunch of flowers, and then he said, “I had this book made just for you.” I’ll show you part of it…It says, “The Jewish Citizens of Arnstadt,” and inside it says, “Shalom,” which means peace. I couldn’t believe that these people who had murdered my grandparents and everybody could say, “Shalom.” On the first page…see the menorah? When you ask, did they feel bad? Some people, I suppose, did. I know

the mayor was too young to have been there. And here's the story of the entire history of Arnstadt from the 12th century on. They hated Jews then, too, in the 12th century. They kicked them out, the Jews came back…they kicked them out, they came back. Frankly, I don't understand that. The temple I was so crazy about was the first temple ever built in that town in 1913. That's not very long ago. In this book, page after page after page you'll see this. It says, "Zun Gedenken," which means, "In the memory of," There's a person who died in a concentration camp and another and another, and it's page after page, page after page, of the people who were murdered in concentration camps. I'm very appreciative to this mayor for having done this. I don't feel blessed to have gotten out of the country, and the reason I don't feel blessed is because my grandparents gave up their visas so I could come… Everyday of my life I know that they gave up their life for me. To know that two people gave up their life for me…and they were only in their forties and fifties? I want to say, yes, that I was fortunate but, no…

There was one girl named Giesela… She had gone to school with me and I was invited to her house one day to play. Her idea of playing was to take dolls and get a big bucket of water and play a game of Jews and see how many Jews we can kill today. She and her friends would scream, "Yeah, let's kill the Jews!" Well, that girl got in touch with me after the war, and said, "I understand you had a little baby and so do I, but I have no clothes for the baby would you send me some?" So that's what she wanted. I did not send her any clothes.

My mother became very Americanized very quickly. She loved it here and, although she always had a little German accent, you know, she just…I think if I would've let her, she would've become a Republican. (laughs) In fact, I think she voted Republican… God, my mother. (laughs) My father never adjusted to this country, really, until I had two children - two boys - and he really forced himself to be more American. He learned perfectly the game of football so he could cheer, you know, the kids for this team and that team. I never got the game in my life, but they loved my father, their grandfather, you know, so that was okay. And I became so Americanized that I sort of pushed all of this in the back of my mind and forgot about it…refused to think about it. Until one day, we were living in the mountains and the whole thing came rushing back at me. I was alone in the house in the daytime and this whole thing came back to me and I started writing it down and that became my book.

I was in my teens by the time the war was over and we were in San Francisco. Everybody went out in the street and everybody went downtown. There were sailors in the street and they were grabbing any young girl they could, and kissed them and hugged them. You know that picture of…there's a famous picture of a nurse being bent backwards with a sailor?…I was standing next to them, I saw that. Oh, my God…she loved it. But no, we knew the war was over, you know, and it was a huge celebration.

The first time I went back to Germany, it was total fear…absolute fear. I went with a cousin to Arnstadt, and I said I don't want to go there, but she said, we're going. She took me around, and said, "Oh, look this church door is open, let's see what it's like." It was ice cold outside, so we went into that church and at the very end of that big church, there was a woman with three coats on and a table in front of her. She said, "Oh, come in, come in, I'm selling books for tourists." Well, there were no tourists, just the two of us. She had these books that said, "Jewish People

Who Had Lived in Arnstadt. She said, "My husband wrote this. Would you like to have a copy?" And my cousin had a mouth about this big, and she said, why don't you join us for dinner with your husband tonight? I thought, oh, God. Well, the husband was a big, big minister of the city. He was against the…this was East Germany…so he was against the Russians and he was what they called an honor citizen. He came and his wife came. And he said, "I've never met a Jew before, but I felt as a good Christian I should write about what happened to all these people who had lived here in this town." So, I was the first Jew and my cousin, also, that he had ever met. His daughter came to pick him up later, and his daughter and I became friends. She came to America and I took her to Hawaii. My son lives in Hawaii, so it worked out really well. The first year that I returned to Germany was 1996. I felt at home right away…fearful, but at home. The last time I went was in December. Although they did this beautiful show and gave me all these wonderful books, there were Nazis there. We were in a hotel, a friend of mine and I, and they were sitting at a table and they were observing us. They never took their eyes off us, just stared at us and made me really uncomfortable. I finally asked somebody, "Who are these guys?" They said, "They're the new Neo-Nazis." I've decided I'm not going back. I've been back ten times. I think I've convinced a lot of young people not to continue with their prejudice. I think I've done a pretty good job. That audiobook I'm passing around? That's in every German school now and the kids have to listen to it…so that's good that they'll learn something about prejudice.

I have two sons and an adopted daughter. I tried to tell them about my experiences, but they weren't interested…not at all. My oldest son knows my story. He is a psychologist in Hawaii and he also works part-time at a school called Punaho School. As a matter of fact, (President) Obama went to that high school. My son gave my book to a class, and then it went from that class to another class. He knows what's in the book, but he doesn't know many of the other things. I told my children, but they…I think they might have known or they may have seen my face, you know, that I was nervous or upset and they didn't want to have that. Neither one of my children wanted to be Jewish, so they're nothing. My younger son always goes to Seder and goes to this and goes to that. He's more Jewish than I am, but he would never say I'm Jewish, per se… not that he's ashamed of it, he's just (thinking)…what's the difference?

I will tell you one more peculiar thing that happened. It was about my third trip out there to Germany, and I was talking to an auditorium full of high school and college students. At the end, I asked if there were any questions and this boy raised his hand and he said, "Yes, when it's all over, can I come up to you and feel your arm. I want to know if you're really human." And I said, "Well, you can come up, but you're going to have to hug me and then you'll know I'm human." And he came up and I closed my eyes when he put his arms around me. I thought I was going to actually get sick … He threw his arms around me and I closed my eyes. When I opened them, the entire auditorium was lined up for a hug…and that was lovely…really lovely. That evening, I took a walk by myself and I was told, "Don't go in that area because that's a bad area. You're going to be attacked…" Oh, baloney. And I walked and there was a car in the middle of the road and a man was in it…I thought, "Oh, boy, I should've listened but I kept walking," and when I returned, that car was still in the road. The man pulled down his window, and he said, "Frau Webb?" And I said yes. He said, "I was there this morning at your lecture and I didn't get to get a hug and I didn't want to interfere with your walk… so can I have a hug now?" And he got out of the car and I gave him a hug, and I think I cried more that day than a lot of times. When you ask about whether I've made peace… I've made peace with some people, like the

innocent children, of course. The children who are ten or twelve, or your age now. They had nothing to do with that. This all happened seventy years ago, but peace with the stories they tell? No.

For a while I worked with Hispanic gangs. I learned Spanish and the kids I knew who were Hispanic said, "You know, you sound really funny when you speak Spanish." I found out I had a German accent in Spanish…Oh, God. (laughs) Anyway, I worked with these kids in schools, with gang members, especially. There was one kid who held a gun to my head one day after school. He said, "You were talking to my sister, you were saying things." I said that I didn't know what things those things were… What are these things? He said, "You know what things are," and I didn't know. He meant that I was trying to tell his sister that his family were gang members. Well, I had no such knowledge, but I knew that he had a gun pointed to my head. I said, "Put that gun down, you idiot, we were talking about becoming a Quinceanera." Do any of you know what that is? For those of you who don't know, when a Hispanic girl is fifteen, she has a big celebration when she becomes a young lady. So he said, "Oh, is that what you were talking about, I'm sorry. What can I do for you?" I said that I had a new car in the parking lot, and in the morning, when I come, the gates aren't closed to the school. Could you maybe watch my car? And he said, "Me and the guys will do it," and they did do it, with their chains and their everything. There was one person always beside my brand new red Honda Prelude. And, at the end of the year, I took about ten of them to a Mexican restaurant in San Fernando, and the owner said, "You can't come in here with these people." I said, "What do you mean - these people?" What does that mean? And he said, "I can see what they are," I responded, "I can see what you are, too…and I promise you that they will be fine." And we went in and they put on manners, they were such actors…"Oh, Señora Webb, could we pull out the chair for you?" It was hysterical. So, I worked with these gang members a lot and I came to understand that many of them considered the gang a family. I was hoping to tell them more about pacifism, because I'm a pacifist and tell them how really evil it was to have these initiations with murders and hurting people. In some instances I was lucky… I know of two gang members who got out of it for sure.. I've written a couple of books about kids who need to get out, but are afraid to get out and how they can do it, what organizations they can run to…other than my house! (laughs) I don't want to change people, I just want prejudice to be gone. If that's changing people? I guess in a sense, it is…but their core personality is probably good. I think there's good in every human being. Everyone has something in them. There's your soul that's pure and good, I hope…and there's that something in you that's good ,and I hope to reach that part when I talk to people to do away with violence.

Assemblymember Audra Strickland
District 37

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Eva Bandel *Interviewed by Rachel E. Culbert*

Eva Bandel

By Rachel E. Culbert

There is much controversy surrounding the Holocaust. Why did Germany and surrounding countries let the Nazis persecute the Jews? Why did people just sit back and watch the horrific acts that the Jews had to undergo? Some people even go so far as to debate whether the Holocaust even happened. For that absurd accusation alone is why I am writing this essay. It is imperative to keep alive the stories of the survivors of the Holocaust. To see the pictures of the starving and persecuted Jews in the internment camps. To never question if the Holocaust happened, but what we can do as individuals to never let it happen again. I want Eva Bandel's story of suffering, loss, and persecution to stay with those who read it. To see what this strong woman had to undergo at such a young age. To know that her journey was real and to never question that.

Eva was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1938. She describes her family and her life with them as interesting. She lived with her father Isaac, and mother Friderka. She also had a brother, Robert, who was fifteen years older than her. Her father was an international soccer player, traveling to different countries representing his country.

In 1943, Jews in Budapest started being put into ghettos. At this time, Eva's father took a train, trying to get out of Budapest to look for a better and safer life for his family. Unfortunately, he never made it. The train was stopped. After the Jews on that train were forced to dig their own graves, they were lined up and shot. These are horrific details, and I do not know how Eva can think about that event, let alone tell it to others. Friderka left Eva with her best friend. Eva's mother needed to try and escape the horrors of the Nazis and thought Eva would be better off being cared for by a non-Jew. Eva's mother told Eva that she was Jewish, but to never repeat that fact to anyone. Too young to understand, Eva thought her mother was leaving her at a babysitter's house and that she would be back for her. Although the lady that was caring for Eva was not Jewish, her husband was a Communist, which was considered to be just as bad as being a Jew. He was killed and Eva and her caretaker fled to a suburb in Budapest. While there, Eva's caretaker paid another woman to take care of her. The woman was also paid to watch other children and to keep them safe from the Nazis. The woman took the money and left the children (including Eva) to fend for themselves. Eventually Eva was found by a nun and taken to a convent, where she resided until the end of World War II. Once the war ended, Robert (Eva's brother) went to look for her. He found her because she was carrying her favorite doll that she had before the war. The two were reunited with their mother as well.

Eva, Robert, and Friderka moved to Munich where they were put into a displacement camp. They were trying to get their lives back together after the chaos of war. There were people from all over who there with them trying to get their lives in order as well. While there, Eva went to school and learned many different languages, including Hebrew and German. After living in Munich, they migrated to Israel. They moved to Jerusalem and were able to get an apartment. Eva continued to go to school and graduated. She then joined the Israeli Air Force. Through the military she was offered a security position because she spoke so many different

languages. Throughout the Sinai War, she was a tremendous asset to the Israeli military because she was multilingual. After serving in the Israeli military, she worked for an Israeli airline.

Eva met her husband through two mutual friends. On the night the two met, he told Eva that he was going to marry her. She replied that he didn't even know her last name. Nonetheless the two married and had a long and happy marriage. The two moved to the United States and owned a contracting business. She describes him as the love of her life and her best friend. Sadly, he passed away on November 21, 2008. The two had four children: Gabriel, Boron, Michelle, and Nicole, and many grandchildren.

Eva has and continues to do much community service. She is an advocate against drug use, as well as against cigarette use. She has served as PTA president of her children's school, and continues to do wonderful service in her community. She has a true appreciation for the United States and the opportunities that she has received after moving to the United States.

Eva has been through many tremendous events. Events that no one should ever have to endure. However, she survived them and is such a strong women because of them. I do not know how Eva can be so open and unemotional while talking about the Holocaust. I commend her for that. She can tell her story to others to teach others about the horrors of the Holocaust. She is strong and I do not know if I could be that strong about events that affected my life so drastically. I do not know how people those that were responsible for all of the tragedies that occurred. They have, though, and that is the first step for healing. I hope her story and the stories of other survivors serve as proof for people who do not believe the Holocaust happened. I also hope that her story helps people to be more tolerant and respectful of people of different races and religions.

Assemblymember Sandré R. Swanson
District 16

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Nelly Cesana — *Interviewed by Anna-Isabelle Dinwoodie, Jason Lucibello and Kanishka Patel*

Marcel Nathans — *Interviewed by Rachel Kogan, Laurel Paxon and Avram Titus*

Acknowledgements

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Nelly Cesana

By Anna-Isabelle Dinwoodie, Jason Lucibello and Kanishka Patel

Nelly Cesana's earliest memory is of her father taking her by the hand to the local store to buy her a chocolate-covered cookie in the shape of a heart. Over sixty years later, she still remembers the taste of that cookie. Unfortunately, she did not have many years with her father. Not even a year later, on Nelly's 4th birthday, September 29, 1939, the German army occupied Poland. Nelly was born in Warsaw, where she lived in an apartment with her mother and father and her brother, nine years her elder. The Germans quickly built an eight-foot wall with barbed wire on top around a section of the city, establishing a ghetto for the Jews. They were rounded up not only from Warsaw, but all the surrounding villages and towns and thrown into the ghetto. The area immediately became congested and neglected. There was little food and no medicine available. Streets were filled with the homeless and starving. Kids who had lost their parents lived on the streets and many just died from the cold. Almost immediately, soldiers came to the ghetto by truckloads and began gathering people wherever they found them. They would knock on doors with rifles, force people into the streets, line them up in rows, and make them run to the railway station. They were shoved into train cars designed for cattle, packing as many as they could into each car. Those who left on the train never came back.

Nellie's brother, 13 at the time, refused to be caged like an animal behind the ghetto wall. He escaped by purchasing false identity papers with the money gained from selling the suit worn for his bar mitzvah. Although he never confided in his family, they eventually learned he had joined the Polish Resistance. He would come into the ghetto through the underground sewer pipes to visit them. And so people started to hide. A friend of the family told Nelly's mother that if she were caught, she should take small steps while running and try to end up at the back of the crowd, because if the train filled up before she got on she would have another chance to get away. This advice saved Nelly and her mother the first time they were forced to run to the trains.

Nelly's family was eventually forced to leave their apartment, and they hid wherever they could. Once Nelly and her mother ran into an abandoned hospital to hide from soldiers. Nelly's mother wanted her to hide under the mattress of a bed, but another woman refused to let her because her own children were hiding there. Nelly and her mother hid instead with a large group of people in an adjacent room whose door was disguised to look like a wardrobe. As they sat trembling in the room, they heard soldiers with German Shepherds enter the room next door, banging on the walls and floor and calling for the Jews to come out. Then, suddenly, they heard shooting, crying, and bloodcurdling screams. The soldiers were dragging the children out from under the mattress and beating them brutally. Nelly was certain that an angel was guiding her and her mother, for while they were in the same desperate situation as thousands of others, they somehow survived.

The most persistent memory Nelly has of the years in the ghetto is her constant hunger, and constant fear that she and her family would be caught and killed. She remembers walking the streets and seeing orphaned children begging for food, starving and freezing because no one had anything to give them. When her mother brought back a cup of soup and a teaspoon of jelly, Nelly begged her for just a taste and then ate the whole thing, and her mother would sometimes

lie down and cry because she was so hungry. Nelly's father took a chance when the Germans asked for ten carpenters to work in the ghetto and volunteered. Although he wasn't a carpenter, he figured that he would be safe as long as he was needed to finish the project. However, after a short while he was rounded up, brought to the train station, and sent to and extermination camp. It was the last time Nelly would ever hear from her father.

Nelly's mother got a job peeling potatoes for tailors in the ghetto who made uniforms for German soldiers. While she worked, Nelly hid under a table. Children were not allowed there, and by this time Nelly never saw other children. Because the Germans had no use for them, children had all but disappeared from the ghetto, starved or deported.

By 1943, the Warsaw Ghetto was nearly deserted and Nelly and her mother, alone, starving, and forced to move constantly into new hiding places, desperately needed help. Some dealers in black market goods managed to enter and exit the ghetto by crawling through the sewers under the surrounding wall, and through one of these dealers Nelly's mother sent a note to her son, who was living a few blocks away from the ghetto with false identity papers. Nelly's brother was part of the Jewish underground, and he managed to get false identity papers for Nelly and her mother. Nelly's brother was renting an apartment from a woman whose daughter he was dating, and this woman liked him very much – he helped her whenever he could and he always paid his rent on time. He told her that he knew a Jewish woman and girl in the ghetto and wanted to smuggle them out. His landlady was so fond of him that she agreed to hide the Jews, although she knew that if they were caught everyone in the building would be killed.

Nelly's brother arranged for Nelly and her mother to escape: Nelly one night, and her mother the next. Nelly was brought to the wall at one in the morning. She climbed a ladder to the top of the wall, watched by her mother below. When she got to the top there was a shooting, and everyone scattered. Nelly's brother, from the other side, called to Nelly to jump. She jumped, he caught her, and he ran with her. Both her mother and she escaped the ghetto. They posed as Catholics, but anti-Semitism was still prevalent in Poland. Nelly's brother insisted that the only way to survive would be to go into the lion's den, working with the Gestapo to get into Germany. After many attempts, Nelly's mother finally worked up the courage to go through with the plan. Their request was accepted without any complications and they were sent to live on a farm in Berlin.

They arrived at a farm near Berlin. It looked like a God-forsaken place. There were just long strips of grass and land. Nelly's mother was given the task to clear the rocks from the field. It was terrible. Nelly's mother was a particularly delicate woman and the work required strength and durability. Nelly and her mother were forced to sleep in barracks with many other men and women. One day, a couple arrived in a limousine. They were pleased that Nelly's mother spoke German and took her and Nelly to their farm which was twenty kilometers away to Ketzin, a quaint village on the banks of the river near Berlin. The couple showed them the barn where they would sleep. It had a small bed with a straw mattress and cement floors. Conditions for Nelly's mother were unbearable. The couple treated her like a slave laborer. She was not only responsible for the work on the farm but she was constantly called to do menial tasks. Nelly couldn't go to school and German children were not allowed to play with her because she was a Pole. Despite it all, Nelly and her mother felt safe for the first time. They even received letters

from Nelly's brother. Reading it with her mother was a cherished pastime. However, one day they received a letter, with different handwriting.

Nelly's mother knew something was wrong. It was a letter from one of her brother's friends named Arthur who worked with him in the Underground and was also Jewish. With kind and comforting words, he explained to Nelly's mother that her son was killed in action and that he was given a nice funeral and buried at the Catholic Cemetery in Warsaw. He also told her the poem he had written on the tombstone: "You served your country. You expired like a candle, quiet and unknown. But you will always be in my heart. Your Friend, Arthur". Along with the letter, he sent everything her brother had left, his letters, and pictures. Her mother was devastated. A short time later, Arthur was arrested and died in prison.

The war was coming to an end. The allies were bombing Berlin. But her mother rejoiced whenever she saw these fighter planes. She hoped that one day they would save her and Nelly – and they did. One afternoon, a jeep arrived in the village with Russian soldiers. Nelly's mother ran out to them, communicating in Russian. The soldiers explained that they liberated Germany. Impressed with her Russian, they decided to make her their translator. Her mother immediately agreed. Still Nelly and her mother did not trust anyone to say they were Jewish. But these soldiers took good care of them and even provided passage for them on the train ride back to Warsaw. Nelly and her mother packed what few belongings they had, including her brother's pictures.

One night on the train, Nelly suddenly woke up and noticed the shoulder bag was gone. The Russians had taken the bag away from her when she was asleep, looking for money or jewelry. Seeing there was nothing of value in the bag, they threw it and all her brother's photos and letters out the window. Nelly's mother was hysterical. She begged and cried to give the bag back. The soldiers were angry. "We liberated you and you accuse us of being thieves?! We are going to throw you out the train and you can walk to Warsaw." She was forced to apologize but they never got the bag back.

They soon arrived in Warsaw but her mother could not recognize any street. Nelly's mother frantically looked for a place to stay. They walked through Warsaw trying to look for old neighbors. Finally after several days of searching, her mother met a man who agreed to take her and Nelly to a town where survivors were gathering. There he introduced Nelly and her mother to his business partner, the man who would become Nelly's stepfather.

This man was an Auschwitz survivor. He had lost both his daughter and son, who were twelve and fourteen years old. The man felt a lot of compassion for Nelly's mother and they clicked right away. He liked the idea that she had Nelly, a nine-year-old girl. It would give him an opportunity to raise another child. They soon got married and the three continued to live in the town. Five years later, when Nelly was fourteen, her mother and stepfather finally received visas to move to Israel.

"I think that the first time in my life that I felt free was in Israel." Although Israel was poor and was being terrorized by Arabs, it was our country. Nelly had a hard childhood in Poland. In Israel her parents were given a small farm by the government. Nelly learned Hebrew

and lived on a kibbutz with other children from all over the world. She made friends and became a nurse at 17. In Israel, Nelly met an Italian Jew. They married and eventually settled in the United States. Her first son, Joe was born in Israel.

Nelly's mother lived in Israel until 1967 when war broke out in Israel and she and her husband came to live with Nelly's family, first in Daly City and then in Alamo, Ca. Her mother lived with them until her death 16 years later. Nelly currently resides in Walnut Creek, CA. She has never been back to Poland but would like to return one day.

Marcel Nathans

By Rachel Kogan, Laurel Paxon and Avram Titus

Marcel Nathans was born in 1922 and raised in The Hague, the 3rd largest city in the Netherlands. His mother was a housewife, and his father worked as a general practice lawyer, having grown up in a very educated and orthodox household.

During this period, there were about 140,000 Jews in the Netherlands, mostly in Amsterdam, though The Hague held the second largest Jewish community. Most Jews were not particularly observant, and Marcel's family was no exception. Though Marcel's father had been raised orthodox, he was no longer as observant, after having some disagreements with his synagogue. Marcel's family did attend the high holy days, though his father often dragged him along.

Relations between Jews and non-Jews in The Hague were reasonably good, though there was a fair amount of anti-Semitism. However, Marcel never came into direct contact with this anti-Semitism. He does remember the Blue Laws, precursors to discrimination against Jewish shop-owners. All stores were supposed to be closed on Sundays, but Jews were given permission to operate on Sunday, provided that they were closed on Saturday.

As Hitler came into power, when Marcel was eleven and just beginning secondary school, life began to change. Though The Hague population was not afraid after the events of the Reichstag fire (Holland was determined to remain neutral), Jews were becoming suspicious and afraid of what Hitler's appointment might bring. In the years before the German invasion of the Netherlands, the Dutch began to see indicators of the events yet to come. People had begun to cross the German-Netherlands border fleeing Hitler, and such immigrants often stopped at Marcel's house to speak with his father, a well-respected member of the community.

In the early hours of May 5, 1940, Marcel could hear the sound roar of German planes overhead and the sound of anti-aircraft guns, and even watched a plane crash one half mile from his house. Five days later, the Dutch surrendered to their new occupiers, the Germans. The new Nazi regime caused much misery among the Jews of the Netherlands, disrupting and terrorizing their lives on a daily basis. The first impact the invasion had on Marcel's life was on his studies and his ability to go to school. Marcel was beginning his sophomore year in college when the Nazis invaded. Soon after, Marcel's school was closed. In April 1942, it was reopened and Marcel began his studies again, but later in the year it was closed again and would remain closed until the end of the war.

In August 1942, Marcel was ordered to report to the transit camp Westerbork and told he would be subsequently transferred to a labor camp. Like many others, Marcel petitioned to get the order revoked but his request was denied. Thus Marcel prepared to go to the camp up to the day he was told to report. That same day, the Nazis requisitioned his house and told his family that they had thirty minutes to gather clothes and other essential goods then had to leave. After the Nazis told his family this, his father said he didn't care anymore about life. This single statement is what changed Marcel's mind from reporting to going into hiding. Before, his father

said that he was going to report for the benefit of his family. but after, Marcel decided to take a risk.

Marcel immediately went into hiding at a friend's house. Marcel was quite safe there because his friend's father was a captain in the Dutch army. The following February, Marcel was told he had to leave for his own benefit. The family had joined the Dutch Underground, and they didn't want to take the risk of having the Nazis search their home and finding Marcel. Before he left though, the Dutch Underground set up a meeting, which ended up being the last time he would see his parents and his uncle. Marcel and his uncle then boarded a train to Enschede where the Dutch Underground had set up a place for them to stay.

Marcel ended up staying in Enschede for the remainder of the war. The first place his uncle and he stayed in Enschede was in a small house with members of the Dutch Underground. Shortly after arriving, his uncle had a falling out with the family and left. Marcel stayed with this family for a year. He was told to leave after a failed V2 rocket launch by the Nazis caused them to step up patrols in the neighborhood which made it too risky for him to stay. He then moved to another family's house in the same city. He stayed in this house until the end of the war. Ironically though, this house was the most dangerous place to stay of everywhere he had previously stayed. The daughter of the family was dating a German soldier. Everytime she came around, he had to immediately run upstairs and hide. When the parents told their daughter at the end of the war that they had hid Jews in their house, the daughter said she thought it took so long for them to open the door for her because they were listening to the BBC (which was illegal at the time). At the very end of the war, it was the most dangerous because of the Nazi's desperation. The Nazis where combing the city block by block, looking for any possible laborers. While the Nazis where searching his neighborhood, he was forced to stand in a 3x5 room with the four other people, hoping the Nazis wouldn't come in. They never did.

Marcel finally knew the war was over when he went downstairs and saw German soldiers retreating from Enschede. While one might expect his emotions to be nothing but pure bliss and happiness, Marcel quickly began to wonder what he was going to do now that the war was over. He was bankrupt and had nowhere to go.

In his desperate situation after the war, Marcel accepted the first job offer he received: a job working with what used to be the Dutch Underground. He was asked to guard Nazi sympathizers in a large warehouse. Marcel described the experience as "very exciting." He guarded the people with a gun, although he had never taken a shot and lacked ammunition. After this stint with the Dutch Underground, Marcel attempted to resume his studies and was eventually able to contract a job as a teaching assistant in Liden. Then Marcel joined the Interpreters Corps of the Dutch Army and traveled to Germany, the place where the practices of the Holocaust were drawn out. He spent eight months working for the British army as an English interpreter and was able to apply his vast knowledge of foreign languages, including his native Dutch, German, French, English, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, and Russian.

After working for a little over a year, Marcel was anxious to pursue higher education. To achieve his goal, Marcel contacted his mother's cousin who lived in San Francisco. With the help of his family, Marcel was able to procure a non-quota immigration visa as a student at the

University of California at Berkeley (Cal). Marcel thoroughly enjoyed studying at Cal. He was a doctoral student in chemistry and proceeded to work in various science labs. It was during this time that he met his wife, Gloria Harris, a Chicago native, with whom he has two children. He worked at the Argon National Laboratory in Chicago and had a research contract with the government. In 1977, Marcel decided to switch his focus and pursue a law degree. He went to the John F. Kennedy School of Law part time and eventually opened his own law firm. He is finally considering retirement this year.

Marcel Nathans classifies his feelings towards the Germans as "mixed." The Holocaust significantly deteriorated his life, but he said he never felt vengeful. His reaction could most easily be classified as confusion. When in Germany working with the British, Marcel couldn't understand how these people had condoned such atrocious acts. He wants his story to be passed on through interviews and in the memories of his children. He has tried to move on with his life and not let his experiences during that troubling time affect him.

Assemblymember Tom Torlakson
District 11

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Judith Perl *Interviewed by Sarah Barrett*

Acknowledgements

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Judith Perl

By Sarah Barrett

Judith's Tale

Judith Schwarczenberg, now Judith Perl, was born in Arad, Romania in 1936. She had an older brother, Edward; mother, Helen; and father, Desideriu.

The community where Judith lived was not predominantly Jewish. In 1936 Arad had a population of about 120,000 people, approximately 25,000 of whom were Jewish. Judith's family lived a comfortable life before the war. Judith's father owned a bakery, which was connected to their house. Her father worked hard and was the sole breadwinner for his family. The Schwarczenberg's were wealthy enough to have a live-in babysitter who taught Judith and her brother different languages, such as German.

Slowly the war in Europe began encroaching upon the town of Arad. Mr. Schwarczenberg started listening to the radio to hear news about the war effort. He would get reports of the war from English journalists. Once the Germans invaded Romania it became illegal for people to own radios. This is because the Nazi government did not want its citizens to hear alternative news stories of the war. Judith's family had their radio confiscated. This was one of the first of many changes to their comfortable lifestyle brought on by the war.

Once the Nazis took over Romania, new German laws concerning the treatment of Jews were passed. All Jews in Romania were required to wear a yellow armband with the Star of David on it; even small children like Judith.

In 1939, the Nazis passed a new law stating that Jews could not own property. This meant that Judith's father could no longer own his bakery. However, Judith's father knew a Gentile, or non-Jewish man, who offered to put their bakery business under his name while still allowing Mr. Schwarczenberg to act as the owner.

For a year, the man pretended to own the business, while the work was being done by Judith's father. However, after a year the man who had pretended to be a friend of Mr. Schwarczenberg said that it was an inconvenience for him to walk the ten blocks from his house to the bakery.

He told Judith's family to get an apartment, and he would move into their house. Judith's family moved into a small apartment in Arad. Soon after that, the Gentile man told Judith's father that since the business was in his name, her father should just let him keep it. The man had taken Judith's family's business, and their home. Her family was powerless to stop this man from taking over the business because under Nazi law Jews could not own any property. Without the bakery, the Schwarczenberg's no longer had a source of income.

Judith's father was forced to go work in a Nazi labor camp. He would do intensive labor in the day, and come home at night. This left the family without their sole provider. They went

from a comfortable living in their house and keeping a kosher lifestyle, to living in the small apartment and eating whatever they could find.

(Do you know what month and date, by any chance, so you can start with "By Date, things) Things where getting particularly desperate for the Schwarczenberg family. They were constantly in fear that German soldiers would come and take them away.

This fear led the family to go into hiding. Judith's uncle was a Gentile and he offered his home to Judith's family to hide in. The Schwarczenberg's went into hiding in this home. They were forced to leave all their possessions in their apartment. They left with only the clothes on their backs.

In the house all the adults slept in the basement while the children got to sleep upstairs in the actual house. The Schwarczenberg family lived in constant fear in their uncle's home. They were not allowed out into the street. No one could know where they were. The children could only go out to play in the back garden and only under strict adult supervision.

One night, two German soldiers came to their uncle's home and knocked on the window. All the adults were sleeping in the basement and only Judith and her brother were upstairs. Judith's brother crept downstairs to fetch his uncle. Only the uncle could speak to the Germans.

He opened a front window to find two German soldiers who were trying to defect. The soldiers demanded that the uncle give them his bicycles so they could get away. In 1940's Romania, bicycles were like cars. Everyone used them to travel around town. They were an incredibly valuable resource, yet the uncle gave up his and his wife bicycles in the hope that the soldiers would leave quickly and would not cause his house to become under suspicion.

The next few days were particularly stressful, no one knew if more soldiers would come back to the house. Luckily, no one came and slowly the family came out of hiding.

They went back to their old apartment in the hopes that life was quieting down slightly. However, there was day-to-day proof the Germans were sill hunting Jews. Despite this hunt, there were acts of kindness from their community.

Neighbors who saw themselves and their Jewish counterparts as fellow Romanians showed acts of kindness by protecting the family. Judith herself observed such kindness, when a man outside her apartment was asked to produce identification by a German soldier. Once this man proved he himself was not a Jew, the solider demanded that this man give the names of Jewish families still living in Arad. This man, with Judith and her mother standing right in front of him, claimed to not know of any Jewish families still in Arad. The solider eventually had to move on.

Judith's family continued to live in that apartment until the end of the war. However, not even the advancing Russian soldiers could stop the Nazis from trying to gather all the Jews in Arad and put them in concentration camps.

One evening, the town loudspeaker announced that all Jews were to go to the town hall the next morning. Everyone assumed that this was one last attempt by the Germans to send all the Jewish people of Arad to concentration camps.

Once again the Schwarczenberg neighbors stepped in and tried to help the family. People offered to at least help and hide Judith. However Judith desperately wanted to stay with her family. She said, "If my parents are going to die, I'm going to die with them." So the next morning they all went to the town hall as instructed. However, the advancing Russian troops made it to Arad before the family was instructed to board a train for Auschwitz.

After World War II Romania remained under Russian control and Romania was forced to become a communist country. The Russians were in Romania for political reasons, not to liberate the country or to save the Jews. The Schwarczenberg's remained in Romania.

Judith went to school, got married and worked under the Communist's regime. It wasn't until 1958 that Judith and her family got to leave Romania under an Israeli passport. The only possessions they got to take with them were Romanian-made goods that could fill the contents of one small wooden crate. Once they got out of Romania, the now Judith Perl, her husband, and her son were able to fulfill her husband's dream of coming to America.

Assemblymember Alberto Torrico
District 20

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Stella Beck *Interviewed by Anish Dave*

Acknowledgements

Rita Greenwald Clancy, MSW
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Stella S. Beck

By Anish Dave

A Ray of Light in Darkness

The of unspeakable suffering and horrors Stella Beck witnessed as a small child, during the Holocaust era, must have left deep personal and emotional scars. She quotes part of a dedication by her cousin Pearl Benisch, an Auschwitz survivor, who authored the book To Vanquish the Dragon: "To my dear cousin Stella, for you and your children to read, to know, and to remember how man can plunge deep into the pit of evil and become worse then a beast." So how did Mrs. Beck cope against all odds? Many of us will never even come close to facing the horrors she encountered. Despite endless reasons to join others that live in the past, Mrs. Beck does not wish to dwell on the horrors and the inhumanities of Nazi madness. Through the strength of the maternal side of her family, which instilled the spirit of positive, deep, and forward thinking, Mrs. Beck now uses the atrocities she faced to better understand the needs in the lives of others. Mrs. Beck is captivating and inspirational with every word she speaks. Her presence alone fills a room. She inspires others to make a positive change in society using her previous hardships. Beginning with the atrocities from her early life, through the struggles of immigrating to the United States and the choices she made to look for the good in people, she has forged a positive, thoughtful personality. There are numerous individual accounts of survivors of the concentration camps in Poland, Germany, and France but not too many accounts in the Soviet Republic of Russia and their Gulags. This is one account worthy to this list.

Itta & Isaac Steinberger, Stella's parents, had a successful dentistry practice in Trzebinia, Poland, near Krakow and Auschwitz. In August of 1935, the family returned to their native Berlin, Germany for the birth of their second child, Stella. In Trzebinia, young Stella lived with her dad and mom, and her older brother Emil in an upper middle class life with nannies, maids, and cooks. This comfortable life in a beautiful town soon came to an end for four-year-old Stella, when the Nazi invasion of Poland and the bombing began. While some of the town's Jewish families stayed in Trzebinia, the Steinberger family decided it would be safer to leave. With the intention of coming back, they gathered some immediate necessities to survive, locked the safe, then their home and front door of the dentistry. Isaac Steinberger rented two horses, a buggy and fled eastward, away from the bombardment, stopping in Krakow to check on and pick up close relatives.

The roads were bombed by invading German forces, with dead soldiers and civilians left all over. Stella still clearly recalls her Uncle Leon lifting her from the wagon and protecting her with his body while the impact of a nearby bombing spewed and covered them with debris. People excavated Stella who was being crushed by the weight of her uncle desperately trying to free himself to save her as he feared she was being crushed under him. In addition, her brother Emil, age eleven, was wounded, with blood gushing from his arm. In order to avoid further German attacks, they left the main road and maneuvered through the forests to get to Lwow, a town between Poland and Russia, where some family members were living. Many events took place in the forest. One traumatic experience she recalls was crossing a river on a raft. A German plane zeroed in at them and, in front of her eyes, the horse and the boatman were shot to death.

With horror and fear of the plane returning, her father and his brother brought the raft to the other side and disposed of the dead horse and the boatman quickly. Little Stella experienced the horrors of the start of the Holocaust first hand. Despite living through extreme conditions, she still felt safe as her parents made sure that she knew that nothing would happen to her. They finally reached Lwow, which started a new chapter in her life.

From the forest, the Steinberger family reached the city of Lwow in Poland, a border town that was the forefront of the war. Everyday, Soviet and German forces vied for control of this important town. At that time, Nazis were using biological warfare against their enemies. Almost everyday, warning signals of gas attacks would fill the ears of the Steinberger family as they rushed to the basement to protect themselves. Despite severe conditions, Stella's mother woke up every morning, put on her gas mask and went to volunteer at the local hospital for injured soldiers, who faced severe jaw and face injuries. Through the strength they received from each other and from their inner spirituality, the Steinberger family survived the lurid conditions. Life in Lwow soon came to an end with a knock at the door one night.

Upon opening the door, they saw Soviet NKVD, Russian police much like the German SS, at the door with their gun holsters open. They informed the Steinberger family that unless they immediately accepted Soviet citizenship, they would be immediately taken as prisoners of war. Isaac Steinberger, an ardent patriot, who fought for Germany's ally Austria in World War I and was taken captive as a POW by the Soviets, refused to accept their ultimatum of Soviet citizenship. In rejecting it, the Steinberger families was instructed to quickly gather what they could and told to board the waiting truck to be transported to the train tracks. There, they were loaded onto cattle cars to be taken to the Soviet Gulags. On the train, the prisoners faced stuffy, dark, and unsanitary conditions with meager rations while under constant watch of the NKVD. During this whole ordeal, the prisoners were not informed of their destination until they reached the Soviet Gulag, a labor camp named NuzyYary. This Gulag was located in the midst of a vast virgin forest with wild animals roaming around. The adult males were mobilized as lumberjacks, and were instructed on how to cut down pine trees and build their own shelter. This all needed to be done speedily as a very severe winter was around the corner of 50-70 below zero temperatures with snow rising up to the roof tops of the cabins. A few cabins already existed, but they were assigned to the NKVD. Some of the Russians who came to run the Gulags helped instruct the building process of the cabins. Life in NuzyYary for the majority, mostly Polish Jews, was nothing like they were accustomed to. Almost all prisoners were affluent professionals whose past did not prepare them for the kind of lifestyle and work of the Gulag.

Stella's mother set up her dental equipment and proceeded to do what she knew best. She would have to walk thirty miles in the wild animal infested forest to the nearest village to pick up dental supplies for those who sought her services. In addition to serving inmates, she served Russians from surrounding areas that needed her expertise especially when they were in pain. To compensate her, they would bring food. Through this dark time, she was the ray of light in everyone's life. To this day, Stella praises her mother's courage, perseverance, and kindness for sharing herself and food she received for her work without ever asking anything in compensation. It was in the Gulag's that Stella first saw how a few empowering people had such a huge and positive effect on her life and those of others.

In 1941, with the formation of a Polish unit in the army of the Soviet Union to fight against Nazi Germany, a decree was passed from Moscow to free the prisoners of war from the Gulag camps. The Steinbergers took that opportunity to leave and embark on a new journey to find a safe haven. However, now they confronted even greater hardships especially those of national famine throughout the country due to Hitler's invasion deep into Russia. The family traveled from the Volga River, to the Caspian Sea, and the deserts of Central Asia in wagons, cattle cars, barges, or whatever they could find to get them to the next town. After all this travel, the family finally stopped in Kargaly before finding work in a factory in the adjacent big city of Alma Ata, Kazakhstan near Manchuria. It was there again that young Stella saw people around her dying of homelessness and hunger; the only way they survived was through Stella's mother's ability to practice dentistry. At the end of the war in 1945, the prisoners of war were allowed to return to Poland. This is when the long journey by train across Russia began. The Steinberger family finally arrived in Krakow and eagerly went to check on belongings in their home in Trzebinia. Noticing the extreme hostility and lingering anti-Semitism, with many returning Jews being murdered in order to avoid having to return their property, the Steinberger family decided to give up everything they owned and leave the country. In order to save themselves and find a new life they were smuggled by underground organizations through Czechoslovakia and ended up at a Displaced Persons camp in Muenchenberg, Germany. At the DP camp, Stella's mother was able to continue her dentistry practice for the camp's refugees and managed to enroll Stella's brother Emil into Frankfurt medical school. Stella was to attend a Hebrew school located in the camp. However, school curriculum was solely taught in Hebrew, which was a language that Stella could not even understand but she found it in herself to manage it well.

In 1949, Stella and family were sponsored by her aunt to come to America. With little knowledge of the English language, Stella landed in Ellis Island, New York at age 14. Again, Stella had to readjust her lifestyle with a new language and new customs. Through all the challenges, Stella graduated from James Monroe High School in the Bronx, New York at the age of 16. From high school, she joined her brother Emil and his wife Anna at the University of Iowa, where they were completing medical school. Due to her father's heart attack, Stella Steinberger returned to New York where she attended Columbia University and worked full time. It is at Columbia where she met her husband Jim who was a recently discharged Korean War veteran. After living in various places around the country, they settled in California where she has resided since 1959 and has successfully raised seven children. Now she is a proud grandmother of over twenty and a great-grandmother of eight. She has owned a service business for over 40 years, is on the Board of Directors of Interface Sharing, which feeds thousands of people, and is the founding president of the Beynenu senior group in the tri-valley congregation Beth Emek. She has also been on the presidential business commission and is the founder of the Trilogy concept to reduce recidivism of paroles and youth at risk. With all she does, Stella still finds time to mentor those who need help.

The story of Mrs. Beck left me utterly speechless, but what left me even more amazed is how she has used her experience not to spread hate but love and inspiration. To this day Mrs. Beck regards the Russian people as some of the most good-hearted people she has ever met, despite all the experiences she faced in the Soviet Union especially the Gulags. While talking to Mrs. Beck, she read the second part of the quote by her Auschwitz surviving cousin Pearl, "How a human being can ascend into lofty heights and become higher then angels. Yes, higher than

angels." A human can ascend into heights of angelic deeds by being like Stella, who has used ideas of her hardships as a young girl from 4 to14 years old in order to touch other lives. This can be seen in the philanthropic endeavors she has engaged in, such as mentoring those in need, participating in interfaith food distribution to the needy, and creating an answer to reducing recidivism. After meeting someone like Mrs. Beck, my only hope is that people in the future can learn from the hardships they confront and use them not as a detriment but an asset in order to better the future.

Assemblymember Michael N. Villines

District 29

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Aaron Abraham *Interviewed by Ashley J. Gosney*

Aaron Abraham

By Ashley J. Gosney

From Greece to California

Mr. Abraham's interview is a living recount of bravery and sorrow; a true testament to the vast array of conditions within the human existence. Aaron Abraham began his lifelong journey in Thessaloniki, Greece, which he characterized as a big city having a population of roughly 95,000 Jews. He resided there with his parents (who were also born in Thessaloniki) along with four brothers and three sisters (whose ages ranged from 3 years to 21 years). His father owned a machine shop while his mother tended to the children and domestic household duties. His was a normal Jewish upbringing in Thessaloniki which consisted of Orthodox Jews who observed all Jewish customs and faithfully followed daily prayer rituals. Although 90 percent of the population in Thessaloniki was Greek Christian Orthodox, the city maintained a friendly atmosphere with its strong Jewish community.

Mr. Abraham had a broad awareness of the events preceding World War II. He recalls the transition of Germany from a poor country to a nation that seemed to have unlimited funds under Hitler's leadership. He questioned the source of the Nazi Party and Hitler's financial backing, and also holds the belief that many wars are pre-meditated as well as driven by economic turmoil. During this time, Mr. Abraham noted that Germans destroyed many European cities while Americans took the leading role in worldwide business ownership (they referred to America as Planitarhes, which is a Greek term meaning "owner of the entire planet").

In 1940, Mr. Abraham married a young woman whom he had known since grammar school. In 1941, Mr. Abraham remembers that Germans took over the city of Thessaloniki. Soon thereafter in 1942, Germans forced all Jews in the city to wear armbands featuring the yellow Star of David insignia. Being branded in this fashion, Jews were forbidden to be present on certain streets. Furthermore, Nazi officials took property and goods from Jews and redistributed them to the Orthodox Greeks; people who had previously established positive and friendly relationships with the Jews in Thessaloniki. A year after the Germans infiltrated the city, the Jews were removed and taken to various German and Polish concentration camps. At the same time, the Nazi Party also installed a German commander under the name of Balheimer to head the actions taking place in Thessaloniki. A few years later, the Americans appointed Balheimer to the position of Director of the United Nations in 1945. Upon the C.I.A.'s discovery that this appointee ordered horrific crimes during the Nazi movement, the United States removed his title within the United Nations. However, Balheimer then went on to become the President of Austria. Mr. Abraham questions the validity of these various political appointments, and speculates that Balheimer's offenses were only taken into account when they were made public.

As tension grew in 1942, Mr. Abraham realized it was no longer safe and decided he and his wife should leave the city. The chief of police, who was a friend of Mr. Abraham's, provided him with an identification card of a Christian Greek named Nicos Kologeros. With the I.D. card, Mr. Abraham and his wife were able to leave the city and live in Bados, Greece, for a few months. However, his wife experienced great sorrow since their family was separated, so she

and Mr. Abraham returned to Thessaloniki. When they arrived in the city, they revealed their true identities and requested to be sent to Poland so they could be reunited with their families.

The eight-day journey from Greece to Poland was one of intolerable conditions: 80 people were forced to stand in each wagon without food or water, and only one soil barrel was provided for the entire wagon. When they arrived at the railroad station in Auschwitz, S.S. (the Schutzstaffel – German for "Protective Squadron") officers used dogs and batons to keep the prisoners in line. A young S.S. officer (who posed as an orchestra conductor) sorted the prisoners into two groups: they were either prompted to return to the wagons where they would be directly taken to the gas chambers, or ordered to remain in the camp where they would do physical labor. Prisoners were told to remove all of their clothes before going into the shower areas, and many were not aware that the "showers" were actually gas chambers. Instead of water, Cyclon-2 gas was released through the pipes, and all of the prisoners in the chamber were dead within five minutes. Mr. Abraham noted that the Nazi officials at Auschwitz were ordered to maintain a set number of 50,000 prisoners at all times.

Prisoners were placed in quarantine for three weeks after their arrival in Auschwitz. Mr. Abraham discovered that there were many Greek women in an area of the prison called Block #10, which prompted him to go look for his wife. In doing so, he whistled to see if his wife would respond, but a prisoner from Yugoslavia warned him again whistling; he told Mr. Abraham that he could be executed for something as minor as whistling. He did not believe the Germans were killing and burning Jews there. He then tried a different approach for contacting his wife – he pretended to be a kitchen worker and took trays of food into Block #10. Once he found his wife, she gave him a list containing all the names of the women in Block #10. When an S.S. officer found out, Mr. Abraham was sent to another camp called Bouna, which was about 10 kilometers away from Auschwitz.

In Bouna, Mr. Abraham befriended a German prisoner who sold him tobacco for gold, although he was not aware of the gold's value. A Spanish prisoner from Argentina told them to hand the gold over to the S.S. officers for fear of being punished. Once the S.S. officers found out, they came for Mr. Abraham and afforded him a three-day punishment. On the first day, he was forced to stand up for a significant number of hours; on the second day, he was forced to stand while bending his knees and holding a heavy piece of wood; on the third day, he was forced to run continuously for a long period of time. On the fourth day, a Red Cross truck took Mr. Abraham (along with two cadavers) back to Auschwitz.

Upon his return to Auschwitz, a disciplinary court composed of S.S. officials gave Mr. Abraham a one-year prison sentence. He was then taken to a different internment camp, Birganou, to serve this sentence. For the first 3 weeks in Birganou, he slept in a bunker cube that measured one meter all around and was given food and water. When the head of the prison discovered Mr. Abraham's former job involved a thorough knowledge of currency exchange, he decided Mr. Abraham could be of use to them. While assisting the S.S. officers, Mr. Abraham experienced better conditions than those at Auschwitz. When his one-year sentence was finished, the officers remarked that he looked much better than when he began his sentence one year prior. Mr. Abraham attributes this to the fact that he had similar eating and sleeping habits during his life in Thessaloniki. In other words, he was conditioned in a way that made him more

able than the other prisoners to deal with what most people would perceive as an especially harsh environment.

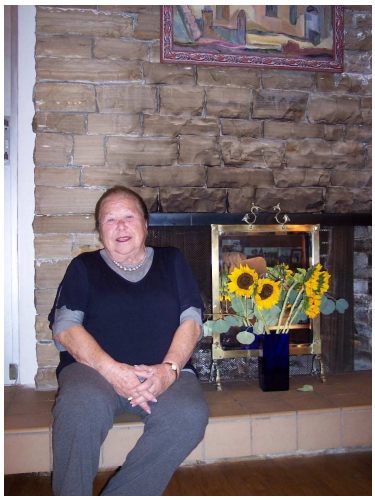
After his sentence was completed, the S.S. officer overseeing him gave him a note to go to Block #4 where they were taking 1,000 prisoners to Warsaw, Poland. The prisoners knew that there were no gas chambers or crematoriums in Warsaw, and their main tasks would involve hard physical labor. Mr. Abraham stayed in Warsaw for one year before the Germans forced the prisoners to walk to a city called Lots, Poland. The journey was 1,500 kilometers and they traveled on a very hot day in July of 1944. They were not provided any water but were given canned meats (with a high salt content to keep them alive). The prisoners were ordered to walk parallel to the Vistoula River in Poland throughout the entire journey, yet were not allowed to drink any water from it. If any one of the prisoners was one step behind, he would immediately be shot in the back of his head.

After their arrival in Lots, the prisoners were put on a train going to Dahao. Mr. Abraham remembers that 3,500 people set out from Warsaw, but only 1,200 people survived the journey to Dahao. About one week after arriving in Dahao, the prisoners were once again transported by train to Bavaria. Mr. Abraham noticed prisoners were treated more humanely on this train, instead of being chained up like cattle. In Bavaria, the prisoners were shuffled back and forth to several different camps before being placed in merchandise wagons that were being brought north. At this point, the prisoners all believed they were on their way to being executed; but within two or three minutes, the locomotive was stopped by shots from U.S. airplanes. Once the train was immobile, the Germans quickly surrounded it to keep the prisoners under control. Mr. Abraham remembers falling asleep and waking up to the joyous crying of his fellow prisoners because American tanks had come to their rescue.

When Mr. Abraham returned to his house in Thessaloniki, he realized he was the only survivor from his family. It was a lonely atmosphere and all of the surroundings were constant reminders of the relatives he lost. If it were not for two of his close friends in the city, Mr. Abraham believes he would not have had the strength to continue his life in this fashion. After a while, he bought a distillery and in 1948 he met a 15-year old girl (Orthodox Christian Greek) who converted to the Jewish faith before they were married. They were divorced in 1961 and she now lives in Palm Springs, CA. In 1967, Mr. Abraham met and married another woman in L.A. (named Barbara) whom he had 5 children with. Regretfully, one of his daughters (Miriam) was murdered in Escondido in 2004 due to a robbery incident.

Throughout his life, Mr. Abraham has experienced many painful events. One may assume such atrocious experiences would undoubtedly turn someone into a cold and vengeful person. However, Mr. Abraham does not fit that description at all. Yes, he struggled with the consequences of death much more than the average person; yes, he felt vengeful after he was finally released from the concentration camps; and yes, he admits that it doesn't get easier as you get older. But none of this prevented him from sharing his remarkable tale of survival and strength. At the end of the day, Mr. Abraham believes that time is the most important thing we have in our lives – we have to use it wisely because one's time on this earth could vanish in an instant.

Miriam and Howard Brookfield
with Simi Sardana



Gerda Seifer

Helen Farkas with Cathryn Dalton

Edy Lange with
Madeleine Jennewein

Ruth Willdorff with
Lauren Meier and Caitlyn Fernandez

German Ayzinger

Luba and David Keller with
Anna Bernstein and Victoria Herbert

Judith Perl with
Sarah Barret

Margot Lobree with
Devon Fernandez

Ruth Goldshmiedova Sax and Kurt Sax with Adriana Hice and Michael Hice

Marion Samuels

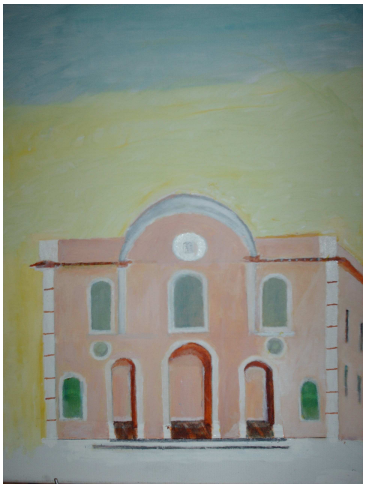
Samuel Oliner with Haley and Jeff Katz

Regina Hirsch with Eva Levy and Tatiana Spottiswoode

Margot Webb with her student interviewers

Mary Bauer with her mother

George Brown at Birkenau Gate



Painting of a synagogue by Aaron Abraham